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Decorative Arts

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Editor's preface.

With the occasional exception of room interiors, architecture is seldom included in published studies on the decorative arts. This hiatus can detract from the full interpretation of early material culture. Architecture provides us with a benchmark in taking measure of the origin and use of movables that filled dwellings, for houses normally are fixed upon their construction sites. Buildings do not migrate about like furniture, and they usually retain a good deal more solid documentation than any "movable."

The Cupola House in Edenton, North Carolina, possesses a number of attributes important to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts. Foremost in these is the building's uniqueness in the southeast. However, the house long has been surrounded by controversy among the ranks of architectural historians, decorative arts historians, and historiographers. A puzzling legacy concerning the exceptional interiors of the dwelling has centered upon Francis Corbin, the agent of Lord Granville, who purchased the house in the 1750s. Certain well-considered evidence has suggested that Corbin could have added the elaborate interior finish to every room of the house during 1756-58, yet the execution and early style of these important rooms have appeared to contradict so late an installation. This puzzle has lent conjecture to the public interpretation of North Carolina's most significant early dwelling.

This issue of the Journal is devoted to a historical, architectural, and physical examination of this exceptional southern house with the intent of documenting the precise nature of the Cupola House as it was built, as it stood in Corbin's time, and as it remains today. For this purpose, Bruce S. Cheeseman, Elizabeth Vann Moore, James Melchor, Marilyn Melchor, Catherine Bishir, Richard Parsons, and Betsy Overton have joined the Journal staff in preparing this two-part study. Mr. Cheeseman compiled his Cupola House research for the Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, in 1980; Miss Moore, as Mr. Cheeseman notes, previously had carried out extensive research on the property herself. A substantial portion of Cheeseman's research dealing with the history of the Cupola House after the Corbin residency was published as "The Survival of the Cupola House: 'A Venerable Old Mansion'" in the January 1986 issue of The North Carolina Historical Review, and we invite those of our readers interested in the later history of the house

to peruse that useful article. We offer our special thanks to the Division of Archives and History for their kind permission to publish the balance of Mr. Cheeseman's work, which we have entitled "The History of the Cupola House, 1724-1777."

The second part of this study, "The Cupola House: An Anachronism of Style and Technology," was written by the editor, based on the observations of all of the survey team, as well as written reports by James and Marilyn Melchor and Richard Parsons. Only those who submitted written material are included in the byline of this article, but that does not diminish the importance of the interaction of all the individuals involved.

Elizabeth Vann Moore compiled an extensive listing of eighteenth century property transactions in Edenton specifically for this study. Forsyth Alexander, in addition to other research, examined a large sampling of architectural sources, both ancient and modern. Other individuals and organizations who have been most helpful are Olivia Alison of Newark, Delaware; Richard Candee of York, Maine; Abbot Lowell Cummings of New Haven, Connecticut; the Cupola House Association; Patricia Gibbs of the Department of Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; the staff of Historic Bath State Historic Site; the staff of Historic Edenton, Inc.; Jeanne Hull of Norfolk, Virginia; John Ingram, Curator, Special Collections, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Mills Lane of Beehive Press in Savannah; Jai Jordan, Administrator, Hope Plantation, Windsor, North Carolina; Betty Leviner, Curator of Exhibition Buildings, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Audrey Michie, Curator of Collections, Tryon Palace, New Bern, North Carolina; Peter Sandbeck of the Preservation Branch of the Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Kevin Stayton, Curator of the Department of Decorative Arts, the Brooklyn Museum and Wesley Stewart of MESDA.

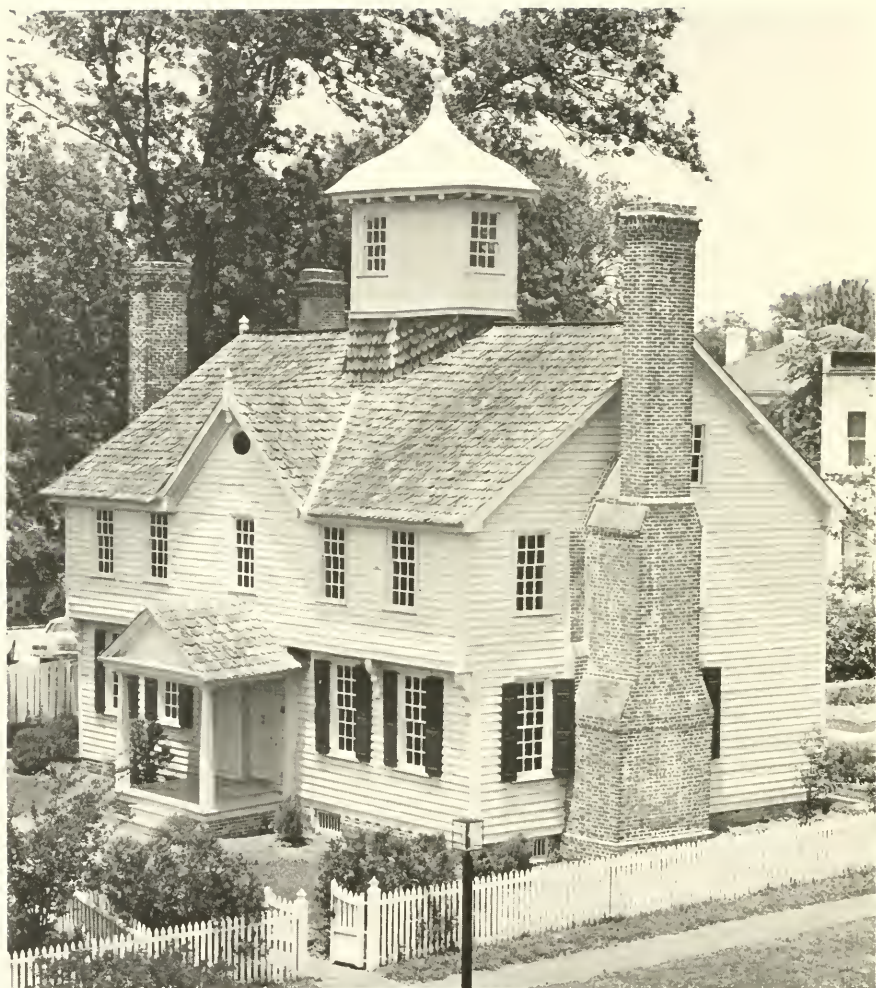


Figure 1. The Cupola House from the southeast, MESDA research file (MRF) S-13,650; all of the Cupola House photographs are by the editor except as noted, and all carry the research file number above.

The History of the Cupola House, 1724-1777

BRUCE S. CHEESEMAN

The Cupola House (fig. 1) of Edenton is one of the most architecturally significant structures in North Carolina.¹ Located in North Carolina's third oldest incorporated town, the house is one of the few surviving in the state that may be dated before the mid-eighteenth century. Once the townhouse of Lord Granville's principal agent, Francis Corbin, the Cupola House served as a private residence until 1918, when its last occupant sold much of the first floor interior woodwork to the Brooklyn Museum of Fine Arts. Facing demolition, the house was saved that year by the formation of the Cupola House Association, the earliest known community-organized agency specifically established for the preservation of a historical structure in North Carolina.² The Cupola House then was repaired and converted into a town library and museum, and the structure served in that capacity until its restoration in the mid-1960s. This undoubtedly is one of the earliest examples of an adaptive use preservation in the state.

Spurred by the initiative and leadership of the late David M. Warren of Edenton, the Cupola House Association, with the guidance of the state's Division of Archives and History and the cooperation of the Brooklyn Museum, authentically restored the structure in a period of over twenty months during 1964-66. Its missing woodwork was painstakingly reproduced under the direction of W. M. Kemp of Hertford, North Carolina.³ Further restoration and interpretation of the structure and site has also continued under the auspices of the Cupola House Association, Historic Edenton, Inc., and the state Division of Archives and History. The formal and kitchen gardens of the homesite were reconstructed in the early 1970s under the supervision of landscape architect Donald H. Parker of Williamsburg, Virginia. C. J. Sauthier's 1769 Plan of Edenton (fig. 3), which clearly depicts the Cupola House and its lot, served as the basis for the garden reconstruction.⁴



Figure 2. A detail from Henry Mouzon, *An Accurate Map of North and South Carolina*. London: Sayer and Bennet, 1775. MESDA accession 3024-3.

The Chowan vicinity of Edenton Bay and Pembroke and Queen Anne's creeks was explored and settled long before the 1712 establishment of what is today the town of Edenton. Indeed, exploration of the region dates to the famed Roanoke voyages of 1584-90, the very beginning of English colonization of the New World.⁵ Further exploration of the Chowan region followed the establishment of the Jamestown colony in 1607, the adventurers often returning with glowing accounts of fertile bottom lands and vast timber forests.⁶ The region itself was included in the Virginia Charter of 1606, and it was referred to in the seventeenth century as "Ould Virginia," "South Virginia," "New Brittain," and even "North Florida." It was in this context, as Virginia's southern frontier, that the Chowan Region initially was settled in the seventeenth century.⁷

In the mid-1650s colonists, primarily from Virginia and Maryland, began moving south into the Chowan and other regions north of Albemarle Sound, settling at first along the fertile river bottoms and sound inlets. By 1662 the population of the Albemarle Region exceeded five hundred individuals, and the

Virginia Council later that year commissioned Captain Samuel Stevens as “commander” of the region, which it called the “Southern Plantation.”⁸ On 24 March 1663, the Albemarle section became part of the newly chartered Carolina Proprietary, and settlement of the region progressed slowly under the governmental policies of the Carolina Lords Proprietors. Albemarle County was established in 1664 as the ruling governmental unit for the entire sound region, and a legislative and court system was established the following year (1665) under the auspices of Albemarle’s first governor, William Drummond.⁹ At that time, present-day Chowan County was a portion of Albemarle County, organized for administrative reasons as Albemarle’s “Shaftesbury Precinct” around 1668.¹⁰ The area was settled amidst the confusion, unrest, disorder, slow growth, and even armed

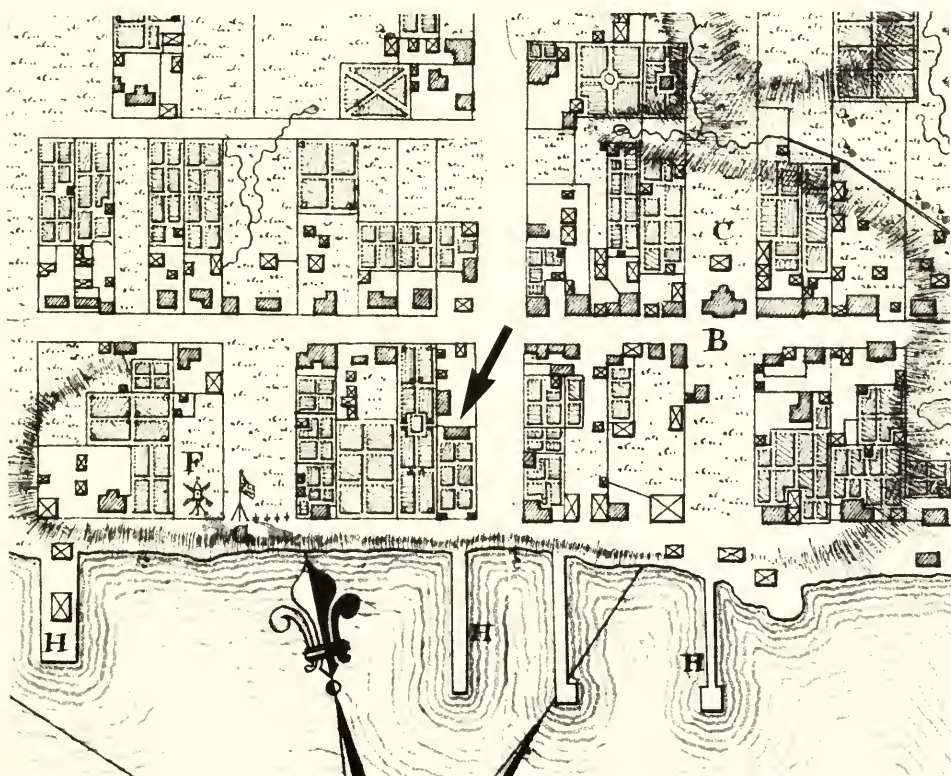


Figure 3. A detail of the Plan of the Town & Port of Edenton in Chowan County, *manuscript map* by C.J. Sauthier, June, 1769. By permission of the British Library, London. The Cupola House and garden lots are directly above the center wharf marked “H,” as indicated by the arrow.

rebellion of late-seventeenth-century Albemarle County. The region was renamed "Chowan Precinct" around 1685, honoring both the friendly Chowanoc Indians and the Chowan River. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the region was being settled rapidly as the Carolina frontier pushed westward across the Chowan River to Bertie and Hertford counties and southward across Albemarle Sound into the Pamlico region.¹¹

Surviving seventeenth-century land records indicate that numerous families settled upon the fertile lands surrounding Edenton Bay and Pembroke and Queen Anne's creeks during Chowan's initial settlement.¹² Many plantations, several of them quite large, were established in the vicinity, undoubtedly because of its easy access to navigable waters. The land Edenton now stands upon originally was part of a 1,000 acre tract owned by a Virginia planter named Thomas Hoskins, who held title to the land by right of a Virginia land patent.¹³ Hoskins established a large plantation along Queen Anne's Creek just east of the present town site, and he renewed his title to the land around 1680 by right of a Carolina land patent. Soon afterward Hoskins sold a small tract of his land containing approximately 150 acres in "the fork of Queen Anne's Creek" (including the present town site) to a farmer named Hancock.¹⁴ Passing through a succession of individuals, the tract was purchased by Nathaniel Chevin, its sixth owner, in 1699; he was one of the most prominent planters in the Carolina Province at that time.¹⁵ Eight years later, on 3 October 1707, Chevin sold a part of the tract to Colonel Thomas Cary, later of Cary Rebellion fame, who in turn sold the land to merchant Thomas Peterson on 26 June 1710.¹⁶

During the early years of the eighteenth century, the administrative duties of the precinct of Chowan, as of the Carolina Province in general, increased proportionally with its population. Despite having been settled for some fifty years, Chowan and the other precincts north of Albemarle Sound possessed neither a town nor a village to handle functions such as the collection of taxes and customs and the registration of lands and deeds. Sessions of court and other precinct responsibilities were carried out at regular meetings held at various farmers' plantation houses. This was a great inconvenience and annoyance to both province officials and settlers alike, who often had to travel long distances over hazardous roads to attend a session of court. Finally, in 1712 the General Assembly voted to establish a town upon the 100 acre tract jointly owned by Thomas Peterson and Nathaniel

Chevin, who apparently had offered the land to the assembly for such a purpose.¹⁷

The land Edenton stands upon probably was cultivated and farmed to a certain extent during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as its owners all resided in the immediate vicinity. As early as 1699 "houses" were recorded on the tract. Thomas Peterson's dwelling stood west of present Granville Street in the vicinity of Queen and Water streets.¹⁸ Also, mariner Abraham Lewis of Currituck may have built a docking slip at some point along the bay front, as records indicate he was involved in the region's early tobacco trade.

The new town site was accessible by both the Edenton Bay and the "Virginia Road," which terminated at the bay front and led to Nansemond County and "Norfolk town."¹⁹ The vicinity was fairly well-settled by 1712, and an Anglican vestry had been established there in 1701.²⁰ The prospects for a new town therefore must have looked fairly good in 1712, and Colonel Edward Mosely surveyed the original plan for the new settlement later that year. Twelve lots wide by three lots deep, the new town lay just east of the Virginia road. Early growth, however, was slow. The first lot was not sold until 1715, and the courthouse was not completed until July 1716.²¹ Three years later, in 1718, the town had a frame courthouse, which was located at some point on the present courthouse green, a public landing, and two or three small houses, but scarcely any other evidences of civilization. The General Assembly reported in 1720 that "there remains great part of the hundred acres not yet allotted."²² The still nameless settlement simply was known as "ye towne on Queen Anne's Creek," and by 1722 the tiny hamlet consisted of the courthouse, a warehouse for taxes and customs duties paid in goods, various small shops for artisans and merchants, at least one tavern, and approximately twenty houses.²³

In the autumn of 1722 the General Assembly decided that the growing village should be enlarged, incorporated, and developed as the "metropolis," or capital, of the province.²⁴ The town was named in honor of the province's late governor, Charles Eden, and a new plan enlarging the town was laid off on the west side of the Virginia road, which became Broad Street. This land had been acquired in 1715 from Thomas Peterson's widow and the Peterson house was reserved by the General Assembly to serve as the "Governor's House and Pasture."²⁵ Designated as "Port Roanoke," the town also was reaffirmed as one of the

province's official ports of entry, and an office for the collection of customs was duly established. Construction also commenced on a building to house the Governor's Council and the General Assembly in October 1722.²⁶

Due to the growing population of the Albemarle, the establishment of Edenton as the capital, and the proximity of the town to Virginia, Edenton grew more rapidly in the second quarter of the eighteenth century than other North Carolina towns of the period. Although actually further from the ocean than any other in the colony, Edenton bustled as a seaport, with sloops, snows, and brigantines entering and clearing daily. Edenton merchants exported a certain amount of tobacco, but naval stores, lumber, staves, headings, shingles, and planks were far more important staples. Corn, herring, and pork also were exported; manufactured goods such as common yard fabrics, linens, silk, shoes, hats, china, and household items were imported along with rum, salt, coffee, sugar, and molasses.²⁷ William Byrd II of Westover in Virginia rather caustically described Edenton about ten years after its incorporation:

This town is Situate on the North side of Albemarle Sound, which is there about 5 miles over. A Dirty Slash runs all along the Back of it, which in the Summer is a foul annoyance, and furnishes abundance of that Carolina plague, mosquetas. They may be 40 or 50 Houses, most of them Small and built without Expense. A Citizen here is counted Extravagant if he has Ambition enough to aspire to a Brick-Chimney. Justice herself is but indifferently lodged, the Court-House having much the air of a Common-Tobacco-House. I believe this is the only Metropolis in the Christian or Mahometan World, where there is neither Church, Chappel, Mosque, Synagogue, or any other Place of Publick Worship of any Sect or Religion Whatsoever. . . .Provisions here are extremely cheap, and extremely good, so that People may live plentifully at triffling expense. Nothing is dear but Law, Physick, and Strong Drink, which are all bad in their kind, and the last they get with much Difficulty, that they are never guilty of the Sin of Suffering it to Sour upon their Hands. Their Vanity generally lies not so much in having a handsome dining room, as a Handsome House of Office; in this kind of structure they are really Extravagant.²⁸

Byrd's wry description reveals Edenton as a growing town in the intermediate stage between a frontier society and a cultivated one. Indeed, Byrd's humorous prose, while exaggerated, is a useful commentary on the nature of life in a tiny southern port. Interestingly, Byrd may have relied on information obtained from others in his observations on Edenton, for there is no documentary evidence that he actually visited the place. Edenton continued to emerge during the 1730s, and Edward Moseley's 1733 *Map of North Carolina* recorded it as six-block area abutting on Broad Street, fronting the bay. In his 1737 *Natural History of North Carolina*, Dr. John Brickell stated that Edenton was the largest town in the colony, "consisting of about Sixty Houses, and has been the Seat of the Governors for many Years. . . ." ²⁹ Edenton finally entered Byrd's "Christian and Mahometan World" when construction of St. Paul's Church commenced in 1736.³⁰

Not long after the incorporation of the town in 1722, the Commissioners of Edenton began the sale of the new lots west of Broad Street, and they auctioned off Lot One of the new plan to John Lovick.³¹ This was the lot upon which the Cupola House was later built and now stands. Lovick came to the province in 1710 as part of Governor Edward Hyde's entourage; he held numerous offices in the colony until his demise in 1733. As surveyor general,³² in 1728 Lovick was appointed one of the commissioners to survey the boundary line between North Carolina and Virginia, and as such he was portrayed as "Shoebrush" in William Byrd's now-famous *Secret History of the Dividing Line*. Lovick apparently was the one North Carolina commissioner Byrd managed to get along with; Byrd described Lovick as "a merry good humor'd Man, [who] had learnt a very decent behaviour from Governor Hyde. . . ." ³³ Lovick purchased Lot Number One of the new plan on 1 November 1722 for a mere ten shillings.³⁴ Approximately 330 feet long by 66 feet wide, the half-acre lot was at the time ideally situated, adjoining Broad Street on the east and fronting the waters of Edenton Bay on the south.³⁵ It might seem that such a waterfront lot in a growing port town would have brought a considerably higher price than ten shillings. As the 1722 deed stipulates, Lovick's title to the lot was conditioned upon the following passage:

Provided that if the sd. Jno. Lovick, heirs or assigns do not erect & build or cause to be erected and built on the sd. lott or half acre of land be it more or less one

habitable house or edifice not of less dimen. Twenty feet in length & fifteen feet wide & seants [sic] & also clear the sd. lott from all trees underbrush or grubbs within two years after the date of these presents than this covenant be void & of none effect. . . .[sic]³⁶

Failure to comply with the stipulation would invalidate the deed, causing the property then to revert to the town commissioners to be used or resold as they saw fit. On 7 August 1723 Lovick sold the lot to Scottish merchant Adam Cockburne, for “a valuable consideration.”³⁷ It is doubtful that Lovick made any improvements to the lot during his brief, nine-month ownership. The deed transferring the lot to Cockburne does not mention any improvements, and the “valuable consideration,” cannot have amounted to much, as Cockburne later sold the lot for five shillings.³⁸

Cockburne, like Lovick, speculated in the town lands of Edenton.³⁹ Also like Lovick, Cockburne owned the Cupola House lot for less than a year, selling it to his friend and political mentor, Christopher Gale, on 25 April 1724, for the same amount he had paid for it, five shillings.⁴⁰ The deed transferring the lot's title to Gale again mentions no specific improvements. However, only eleven days later Christopher Gale sold the lot to Richard Sanderson, Jr., of neighboring Perquimans Precinct for the startling sum of £25, exactly one hundred times as much as Gale had paid for it.⁴¹ Like the previous deeds concerning the lot, no existence of a house or edifice of any kind is acknowledged in the transaction. Obviously, Gale could not have made any substantial improvements to the lot in so short a time, therefore making the inflated price paid by Sanderson an unusual transaction for an apparently vacant lot.

As Chief Justice of the colony from 1712-32, Gale was one of the most powerful and influential figures in proprietary North Carolina.⁴² Among Gale's residences was a large plantation along Queen Anne's creek which bounded Edenton on the east, and he held numerous local offices along with his proprietary duties.⁴³ Gale was one of the first commissioners of Edenton, and he was collector of customs for Port Roanoke at the time of his death in 1734. As an influential member of the General Assembly and Governor's Council himself, Richard Sanderson, Jr., was acquainted with Gale prior to his purchase of Lot One in the spring of 1724. Since Sanderson was not a resident of Chowan, Gale

simply may have acted as his agent in buying the lot. In such a case, Gale's services would not have come without a fee, and perhaps the 25 included a hefty commission for himself. It is also possible that Chief Justice Gale saw an opportunity to garner a substantial profit from an "outsider," although this seems unlikely since Sanderson married Mrs. Gale's sister soon afterward.

Documentary evidence surrounding the construction of the Cupola House requires an examination of the Sanderson family. Richard Foster, an English sea-captain whose name appears in the records of Lower Norfolk County, Virginia, as early as 1641, was granted 150 acres by the General Court of Lower Norfolk County for having transported Richard Sanderson, Sr., John Sanderson, and a "maid servant" named Joane to the colony.⁴⁴ The Sandersons also appear to have been Englishmen; the careers of Richard Foster and Richard Sanderson, Sr., were closely entwined from this date onward.

In the early 1660s, Captain Foster and Richard Sanderson both moved into the Albemarle Region, settling in what is today Currituck County. Richard Sanderson, Sr., later stated in a deposition of 13 June 1711 that he had come to North Carolina "ye yere next after King Charles II was restored" and settled "nere the head of Currituck Bay, which runs about twelve or fourteen miles to the narw's of Currituck inlet."⁴⁵ Foster apparently settled nearby, and he quickly acquired prominence in the new province. In the 1670s Foster was appointed as one of the Lords Proprietors' deputies and served as such on the Governor's Council throughout the decade; he also rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and Commander of the Albemarle militia at the same time.⁴⁶ Although a representative of the Proprietors, Foster was one of the leaders of "Culpeper's Rebellion" in 1677-78, a brief uprising against the arbitrary rule of Proprietary Governor Thomas Miller. In fact, after reviewing the rebellion, the King's Council in England concluded that Richard Foster had helped young John Culpeper "contrive" the riots.⁴⁷ Following Culpeper's Rebellion, Foster served as a member of the council in 1680 under Governor John Jenkins, who replaced the deposed Thomas Miller. This is the last record of Foster in the colony; no record of his death has survived.⁴⁸

It was Captain Richard Foster and the antiproprietary faction that introduced Richard Sanderson, Sr., to the turbulent politics of proprietary North Carolina by choosing him to serve in the assembly following the overthrow of Governor Thomas Miller in

December 1677.⁴⁹ From this moment until his death in 1718, Sanderson held numerous and influential offices in Carolina's proprietary government. Among other positions, he served as a member of the council, member of the assembly, a justice of the general court and court of chancery, and a proprietary deputy.⁵⁰ Sanderson was most influential as a member of the Governor's Council, and he was one of the leaders of the successful opposition to corrupt Governor Seth Sothel in the late 1680s.⁵¹ Foster may have been more than Sanderson's mentor in politics, possibly serving as well to instruct him in the "lessons of the sea." After establishing his plantation "near the head of Currituck Bay," Sanderson became a ship owner of some pretensions and apparently became quite prominent in the early coastal tobacco trade. Two of his vessels, *Richard of Currituck* and *Richard of North Carolina*, both shallops of four tons burden, appear frequently in the early port records of Rappahanock, Virginia. The master of both vessels was Sanderson's son, Richard, Jr.⁵² The elder Sanderson's plantation was approximately 1,300 acres, and he owned twelve slaves at the time of his death in 1718.⁵³ Along with Richard, Jr., Sanderson also was involved in a partnership with Hugh Campbell and Governor Henderson Walker to raise cattle on Ocracoke island, but this attempt was not successful.⁵⁴ Despite such abortive ventures, the Sandersons have been adjudged one of the wealthiest families in North Carolina between 1717-21.⁵⁵

Little is known about the personal life of Richard Sanderson, Sr., who was born in 1641. The name of his first wife remains unknown, as does the exact number of his children. At least four, however, are known: sons Richard, Jr. and Joseph, and daughters Susanna and Cesiah.⁵⁶ About 1711, Sanderson married a widow, Damarus Coleman, whose first husband, Ellis Coleman, "died beyond the seas intestate" leaving her as administratrix to a "vastly troubled" estate.⁵⁷

On 29 July 1718 Thomas Swann, Damarus Sanderson's attorney, exhibited in court what Mrs. Sanderson claimed was "the last will and testament of her late husband Richard Sanderson, Esquire." On the same day, however, Richard Sanderson, Jr., entered a "caveat against sd. will of his father."⁵⁸ After hearing the testimony of both sides, and "the evidences thereto being examined," the court ruled that "the same is not a good will" and indicted William Alexander, the Collector of Customs for Port Currituck, for forgery. Mr Alexander's

subsequent testimony on 30 March 1721 explicates the case:

Wm. Alexander setting forth that he being a person very ignorant in any legal proceedings, through the over-persuasion of Mrs. Damarus Sanderson he undertook to write the will of Richard Sanderson, Esquire, husband of the said Damarus . . . and being ignorant of the consequence of such matters did by her order put severell things without any orders from the said Richard Sanderson not then considering but that her orders were sufficient for his so doing. . . .⁵⁹

Alexander later was absolved of the forgery charge, and the estate of Richard Sanderson, Sr. was properly administrated by Richard, Jr. Damaras Sanderson died in 1719, soon after her November 1718 marriage to Thomas Swann,⁶⁰ thus escaping any criminal charges that may have been brought against her.

Born in Currituck Precinct in either the late 1660s or early 1670s, Richard Sanderson, Jr., learned navigation from his father at an early age. Late-seventeenth-century port records show that he served as master of many ships in the early coastal tobacco trade, and he became involved in the more lucrative New England and West Indies trade while still a young man.⁶¹ In March 1698 a vice-admiralty court charged that Richard Sanderson, Jr., along with Captain Anthony Dawson and others, “rifled, defaced and broke up HMS *Swift Advice*, a ship of war of our sovereign Lord the Kind driven on shore in this government by storm and deserted”; Sanderson was arrested and jailed soon afterward.⁶² The charge later was dropped, however, apparently because of the influence of his father, who posted bond and paid several “fees” for Richard, Jr.’s release from prison.⁶³ Later, in 1714 merchant John Blish accused Richard Sanderson, Jr. in court of illegally transporting two of his Indian slaves to New England for sale; the court subsequently found Sanderson guilty and awarded Blish the amount of money Sanderson had received for the sale of the two Indian slaves plus an additional 30 for “damages.”⁶⁴ Despite such shenanigans, Sanderson prospered greatly in the New England and West Indies trade, and he soon became one of the leading maritime merchants in North Carolina.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, young Richard Sanderson acquired title to a vast acreage throughout the Outer Banks region and along the northern shore of Albemarle Sound.⁶⁵

Among other lands, he obtained and procured clear titles to the entire island of Ocracoke and half of Roanoke Island.⁶⁶ Sanderson's small fleet of vessels, including the brigantine *Sea Flower* of 40 tons and the sloop *Swallow* of 10 tons, utilized both Ocracoke and Roanoke for transferring coastal and West Indian cargoes; in fact, the corridor between Roanoke Island and the mainland came to be known as "Sanderson's Channel" during the early years of the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ Sanderson also was instrumental in trying to establish a town near the present location of Manteo on Roanoke Island, but these efforts failed in 1716 and again in 1723.⁶⁸ At some date prior to 1715, Sanderson established his "manor plantation" on the west bank of Little River in Perquimans Precinct where he resided until his death in 1733.⁶⁹ He owned quite a few slaves, both Indian and black.

In March 1715 the assembly and general court met at "Captain Richard Sanderson's house in Little River."⁷⁰ His political career had begun at an early age; records reveal that he was appointed a justice of the general court and member of the council on 22 April 1695.⁷¹ From that date onward, Sanderson was a constant member of council and justice of the general court, and he twice served as speaker of the assembly (1709, 1715-16).⁷² In 1712 Sanderson married Elizabeth Mason of Virginia, the widow of Thomas Mason (d. 1711), who had been a member of the House of Burgesses in 1696 and a justice of Lower Norfolk County.⁷³ She apparently was Sanderson's second wife; the name of his first wife remains unknown. Elizabeth Mason Sanderson died soon afterward, however, and Sanderson remarried in 1726, taking widow Ruth Laker Minge, Christopher Gale's sister-in-law, as his third wife.⁷⁴ Tragically, the third Mrs. Sanderson died two years later in 1728, leaving Sanderson a three-time widower.⁷⁵ At least three children were born to Sanderson, apparently all in union with his first wife: Richard, III (d. 1737), Grace (d. 1744), and Elizabeth (d. 1767).⁷⁶ The name "Richard Sanderson" appeared in three following generations of the direct descendants of Richard, Sr., of Currituck; the death of Richard Sanderson VI of Durants Neck without heirs in 1816 brought to a close one of the most influential and prominent family lines in the history of early North Carolina.⁷⁷

As we have seen, Sanderson purchased new plan Lot One from Christopher Gale for £25 on 6 May 1724.⁷⁸ Neither Sanderson's deed nor any of the previous transactions renewed the amount of time allotted for improvement in the initial property deed;

thus, instead of an additional two years, Sanderson had just six months before the reversion deadline to erect, or at least begin construction of, a "habitable house or edifice . . . not less than twenty feet in length, fifteen in breadth eight half-feet in height."⁷⁹ Sanderson indeed fulfilled the requirement for improvement; two years later, on 26 April 1726, he sold "lot no. one & house in the new plan of the town of Edenton" to John Dunston for £100.⁸⁰ This is the first recorded acknowledgement of the existence of a house upon the lot, and the price of £100, while not exorbitant, indicates that it was a fairly substantial dwelling. Yet one cannot determine with documented certainty from this record alone that the dwelling erected for Richard Sanderson, Jr., in 1724-26 was actually the structure known today as the Cupola House. However, the acknowledgement of a house in every one of the later property deeds strongly suggests that the dwelling constructed for Sanderson was indeed the Cupola House. From this scant information, we may surmise that the Cupola House, or at least a portion of it, was built during the years 1724-26.

Several plausible explanations exist regarding Sanderson's motives for constructing a dwelling in Edenton at the time. As a frequent member of the council and assembly, Sanderson might have wanted a residence in the new capital for convenience when the legislature met; the house could have provided revenue from rental the rest of the time. Sanderson's estate papers reveal that his shipping interests brought him into frequent contact with various Edenton merchants, and it is possible that Sanderson wished to establish a "seat" of business in Edenton. Simple speculation is another motive, since the house was located close to the planned site of the new courthouse. An even more personal motive, though improbable, is suggested by the marriage of Sanderson's daughter, Elizabeth, to John Crisp, the son of an Edenton merchant, in July 1725; perhaps the Cupola House was constructed to serve as the young couple's first home.⁸¹

More difficult to determine, however, is the original appearance of the structure, and this question has produced divided opinions among scholars who have studied the structure and its history. In its present state, the Cupola House, with its lavish interiors, imposing chimneys, and crowning "lanthorne," makes much more sense architecturally as an elegant townhouse for the wealthy Sanderson or as a dwelling for his daughter and son-in-law than it does as a dwelling for rent or sale. Nevertheless, records

reveal that Sanderson sold the structure soon after its completion for a seemingly low sum.⁸² This fact has suggested to some that the Cupola House was originally a more modest dwelling, perhaps simply plastered inside in lieu of its splendid paneled and carved interiors known today.⁸³ *Editor's note: we found it appropriate to add the following information regarding contemporary property sale prices to Mr. Cheeseman's study.* The £100 sale price of Sanderson's house indeed seems low, but it is difficult to compare with other structures of the period. Houses were seldom described in deeds, and their value was contained within the total value of the real estate. Listed values can be problematical, since considerations may have been present that were not reflected in stated deed values. An extensive search of Chowan County deed books by Elizabeth Vann Moore reveals that during 1723-26, Edenton properties with improvements sold for as little as £15 (Thomas Matthews to William Badham, lot 36 in the Old Plan, with buildings, 13 March 1723/4) and as much as £230 (Patrick Ogilby, joiner, to James Winwright, lot 10 in the Old Plan, with houses, 13 October 1724). On 23 March 1726/7, Christopher Gale sold William Little lot 20 in the Old Plan, containing houses, edifices, and fences, for only £53. Both men were resident on this site, and since both were men of station and wealth, the house hardly could have "been a shanty," in Miss Moore's words. None of these structures survive, however. As in the transferral of the Cupola house, the sale price of each represented pounds sterling, for there was no North Carolina provincial currency at the time. In Williamsburg, gunsmith John Brush's story-and-a-half house, which still stands on Palace Street, was sold in 1728 for £100 Virginia currency; the two rear wings now a part of the dwelling had not yet been added. At that time, a Virginia pound was worth approximately 80 percent of a pound sterling. The Brush house, therefore, sold for about £80 sterling.

John Dunston, who purchased the house from Sanderson, had been appointed the "Naval Officer and Receiver of the Tenth of the Fishery . . . for that part of Carolina . . . that lyes north and east of Cape Fear; the Lords Proprietors had awarded him that office in June 1723."⁸⁴ As Naval Officer of North Carolina, Dunston's responsibilities included the keeping of all the province's shipping records and the collection of various bills of custom accordingly due. For his efforts, Dunston was to receive a fee of £10 for every 100 of customs duties collected.⁸⁵ Considering that there were four official ports in the Pamlico and

Albemarle by 1723 — Bath, Beaufort, Currituck and Roanoke — Dunston's job was arduous. He departed England soon after his appointment and arrived in Edenton in the autumn of 1723; on 16 November Dunston appeared before the council with his commission and instructions and took the oath of office.⁸⁶

At the time of Dunston's appointment, George Burrington was governor of the colony, and Dunston, like many other officials, soon ran afoul of the tempestuous Burrington. In May 1724 Burrington attempted to replace Dunston with a favorite of his own. However, his effort was thwarted by the assembly, who staunchly supported John Dunston; Dunston in fact appears to have been quite popular in the colony despite the fact that his job was to collect the customs.⁸⁷ In explaining his action to the Lords Proprietors, Burrington exclaimed that "Dunston's ill-behaviour obliged me to do so how can he be Naval Officer to four ports (there being so many here) passes the understanding of all people of these parts."⁸⁸ Dunston's triumph was short-lived, however; he died two years later in the late summer of 1726.

It is not known if Dunston's wife Martha emigrated to the colony with her husband in 1723, or, whether she was an Edenton woman whom Dunston met and married soon after his arrival.⁸⁹ The Dunstons apparently boarded at first, perhaps at the house of Thomas and Ann Parris, and circumstantial evidence seems to suggest that the Dunstons may have been living in the Cupola House some months prior to John Dunston's actual purchase of the property in the spring of 1726.⁹⁰ Martha Dunston acquired full title to the dwelling and lot by right of her husband's will. At the time of his death, John Dunston and his family (probably two small sons by then) had occupied the Cupola House less than a year. Probated on 24 September 1726, John Dunston's will of 15 November 1724 simply stated: "I give and bequeath to my loving wife Martha Dunston all my real & personal estate forever and do hereby appoint her my sole Executrix. . . ."⁹¹ Eleven months later, on 1 August 1727, Martha Dunston sold her "lott & house" back to Richard Sanderson, Jr., for £100, the exact price that her husband had paid for it.⁹² It appears, however, that Martha Dunston and her family continued to reside in the dwelling until the summer of 1730, when she purchased a dwelling and four lots "uptown" (two blocks north of the Cupola House) on the east side of Broad Street, the site upon which the Thomas Barker House was later built.⁹³ As executrix of her husband's estate, Martha Dunston probably sold the Cupola House and lot

back to Richard Sanderson, Jr., in 1727 to raise “ready money” for settling the estate; she may have waited until that responsibility was taken care of before she purchased another dwelling.⁹⁴ After Martha Dunston’s lease ended in 1730, Sanderson probably continued to use the house as rental property until he sold it once again on 12 November 1731 to a merchant newly-arrived from England, William Morton. Morton paid “85 pounds Province Bills” for the property. This is the first deed that indicates that possible further improvements had been made to the lot, since it acknowledges “houses outhouses & Edifices” upon the half-acre tract.⁹⁵ The “85 pounds Province bills,” however, represents a depreciated sales price, and certainly does not suggest that any substantial improvements had been made to the property.

For the next twenty-five years, 1731-56, the Cupola House was owned by William Morton and his heirs.⁹⁶ Unfortunately, little is known of William Morton, and extensive research produced only fragments of documentary material regarding his life and residence in Edenton during the 1730s and 1740s. Morton was apparently a factor for a mercantile firm in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. His 1731 deed for the Cupola House is the first recorded evidence of his presence in North Carolina, and his name appears irregularly for the next eighteen years or so in various Chowan County records, such as tax and jury lists and court minutes. Besides dealing with Edenton merchants, a later power of attorney indicates that Morton was doing business with merchants in Northampton County, Bertie County, and the town of New Bern as well.⁹⁷ Such a wide range of business and travel was not uncommon for an active colonial factor.⁹⁸ Although the Cupola House apparently served as Morton’s residence while he was in the colony, it may have been leased out as rental property during the years Morton was absent on business from North Carolina.

On 23 August 1732 William Morton “of Edenton” appointed John Montgomery, then the Attorney General of North Carolina, as his “true certain and lawful attorney” to:

[act] for me [Morton] and in my name for and on my behalf to contract, agree for, and to sell and dispose of my house and lot in said town of Edenton distinguished by the number or figure of (1) one in the new plan of the said town, and upon sale thereof commence and on my behalf to sign, seal and execute all or any such deeds, conveyances and assurances. . . .⁹⁹

Morton probably made the power of attorney while preparing to return to England, and the document seems to suggest that at the time Morton did not expect to return to North Carolina. However, Morton did indeed later return, and Montgomery never sold the dwelling and lot as specified, for Morton's heirs acquired the title to it upon his death in the 1740s.¹⁰⁰ Thus it seems plausible that John Montgomery may have utilized the Cupola House as his Edenton townhouse during Morton's apparently prolonged absences from the colony, since the power of attorney would have given him a nominal title to the property in such a situation. Montgomery's possible residence in the house is not a documented certainty, however, for he also owned other properties in Edenton.¹⁰¹ It may be that Montgomery merely acted as a rental agent and attorney for William Morton. Indeed, the scarcity of material on both Montgomery and Morton precludes any facts about their use of the Cupola House; indeed, virtually nothing, with the exception of ownership, can be documented about the Cupola House itself during the twenty-five years it was owned by William Morton and his heirs. This is undoubtedly the most obscure period in the structure's history, and Morton today remains the leading engima in the puzzling history of the Cupola House.

Either a bachelor or a widower, William Morton died in the mid-1740s. He apparently was in Edenton at the time of his death; he left no will. As next of kin, Morton's brother, George, and his sister, Elizabeth Graham, inherited the Cupola House and lot. Soon afterward, George Morton, a Newcastle-upon-Tyne mercier and clothier, died, and his interest in the property passed to his daughter Margaret Peck, niece of William Morton and the wife of William Peck, "gentleman" of Newbiggin in the county of Northumberland.¹⁰² The Morton heirs never left England, and they signed a power of attorney in 1749 with three North Carolina lawyers, Thomas Barker of Bertie County, William Cathcart of Northampton County, and Daniel Granden of the town of New Bern and Craven County to settle the estate of "William Morton, late of Edenton in North Carolina in America, merchant, deceased." The power of attorney authorized Messrs. Barker, Cathcart, and Granden

. . . to make execute & give & to sell & to dispose of &
bargain for all or any such messuage tenant lands grounds
lots hereditaments goods & effects to & with any person

or persons whomsoever as the or any of them shall think & adjudge right.¹⁰³

The subsequent history of the Cupola House centered upon the controversial career of Francis Corbin, who had come to the colony to assist in overseeing management of one of the largest privately-held blocks of land in North America. This vast tract was a remnant of the territory controlled by the Lords Proprietors for sixty-five years. Although Anglo-Virginians settled in the area north of Albemarle Sound as early as 1655, before the Proprietary charter, the North Carolina frontier had advanced inland only about 100 miles by the 1720s. Dr. John Brickell, an Irish physician who lived in Edenton for a short time about 1730, reported that:

The planters for the most part live by the water side, few or none living in the In-land parts of the country at present, though the Lands are as good and fertile as any that are yet inhabited; but not so commodious for carriage as by the Water, for most part of the Plantations run but a Mile backwood into the Woods, so that betwixt every River you shall see vast Tracts of Land lying waste, or inhabited only by Wild Beasts.¹⁰⁴

This comparatively slow development of the colony forced seven of the eight Proprietors of Carolina to sell their lands back to the Crown in 1728; only John Carteret, Earl of Granville, retained his share, which consisted of the country lying south of the Virginia border to 35° 34' north latitude.¹⁰⁵ The charter granting this territory, which comprised most of the northern half of the colony, was not completed until 17 September 1744, some sixteen years after the end of North Carolina's proprietary rule. Two months later, Earl Granville sent one of his attorneys, Francis Corbin, to America with the new proprietary charter and various other packets of documents and letters for the governors of the two Carolinas. Corbin was also to meet with Colonel Edward Moseley, who had been the Earl's agent in North Carolina since 1740, and deliver to him Granville's personal instructions for the conduct of his now greatly enlarged proprietary affairs. According to the instructions, Corbin was to be given considerable responsibilities. The arrival of Francis Corbin at Charleston in the winter of 1744-45 marks the beginning of one of the stormiest political careers in colonial North Carolina.¹¹⁰

Francis Corbin (?-1767) was born in Great Britain of unknown parentage, probably in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Research in the British Archives failed to reveal Corbin's ancestry, but it now seems certain that he was not related to the prominent Thomas Corbin family of Hall End, Warwick, whose descendants distinguished themselves in colonial Virginia. Francis Corbin's early life has also remained a mystery. Circumstantial evidence suggests that he was from the London area, a son of an apparently well-to-do family. That he received a liberal education, however, is evident; Corbin was extremely well-read and an efficient and aggressive orator and epistolarian. Although no known portrait of Corbin survives today, his letters suggest that he was of slight build, perhaps even frail in nature. His travels throughout the vast Granville district constantly left him physically exhausted. Intelligent and sharp, but opinionated and outspoken, Corbin seems to have been either admired or detested, and his unsteeped ambition and political acumen evoked responses of both sentiments from colonial North Carolinians.¹⁰⁷

Receiving Earl Granville's instructions and other packets, Corbin departed London aboard a British Navy Man of War in mid-November 1744, and he probably arrived at Charleston about the New Year. After meeting with Governor Glenn of South Carolina, Corbin traveled to the Cape Fear where he met Colonel Edward Moseley as instructed. Corbin's letter of introduction from the Earl to Moseley revealed Granville's faith in Corbin:

Mr. Corbin, who is sent with These to Mr. Mosely, is one I have a value for, whom I recommend to Mr. Moseley. He will be assistant to & act in Concert with him in my affairs, & when some progress shall have been made therein, He is to return home, & by him Mr. Moseley will fully inform me of all matters & I hope, be able to transmit to me a complete Rent Roll. What money Mr. Corbin shall want for the time he shall remain in North Carolina & on his return home, I have desired Mr. Moseley to supply with from time to time, taking his Receipts to the amount of two hundred pounds ster. charging the same to my account.

GRANVILLE.¹⁰⁸

The letter also specifically stated that "Mr. Corbin will avoid concerning himself in any disputes among the Gentlemen in

North Carolina,” an instruction that Corbin did not heed.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, it appears from the records that Corbin and Moseley soon fell into disagreement over the nature of Corbin’s responsibilities. Moseley, a proud and prominent North Carolinian, ignored Granville’s instructions and shared his duties instead with a fellow-Carolinian, Robert Halton.

As a consequence of Moseley’s defiance, Corbin found himself without immediate employment in North Carolina since Earl Granville had provided him with neither a commission nor a power of attorney. Granville’s £200 allowance probably lasted for a short time, for Corbin seems to have been a man of elegant taste. By the winter of 1745, Corbin was forced to advertise in the *South Carolina Gazette* that he would teach reading, writing, and arithmetic.¹¹⁰ However, successful appeals to his patron brought Corbin a commission the following year, when Granville made him one of the commissioners to survey and extend the southern boundary of the proprietary. Corbin and the other commissioners surveyed the boundary line from a site at Deep Creek in Chatham County, where the survey had been terminated in 1743, to a point on Coldwater Creek in Rowan County near present-day Salisbury. There they were forced to discontinue their work because the country was so thinly populated that they could not obtain sufficient corn for their horses or provisions for themselves.¹¹¹ This was the first of many trips Corbin was to make across his patron’s vast piedmont lands. Considerable progress having thus been made in the Earl’s affairs, Corbin returned to London in early 1747 as instructed, undoubtedly to “fully inform Granville of all matters.”¹¹²

Very little is known about Corbin’s initial three-year stay in North Carolina. He apparently resided in the Cape Fear region, associating with luminaries there such as Moseley, “King” Roger Moore, James Moore, Matthew Rowan, and John Swann.¹¹³ Corbin apparently traveled throughout much of the colony, however, and he must have visited Edenton, although his name does not appear in any of the Chowan records for the period. Corbin’s associates, all political opponents of Governor Gabriel Johnston, undoubtedly influenced Corbin’s subsequent opposition to the governor, which began almost immediately following his return to London.

In London Corbin established a mercantile business for trade with North Carolina, and he soon became one of the leading figures in the London-based anti-Johnstonian forces seeking the

governor's removal.¹¹⁴ In a 1748 letter to the Duke of Bedford, Secretary of State for the Southern Provinces, Corbin represented himself as a "Person interested in the Province of North Carolina," and assailed Johnston's performance as governor:

From all which and other illegal Measures of the said Govr. the Colony is now thrown into the utmost Confusion, its Credit utterly destroyed, and the whole Province is become little better, than a Resceptacle and Asylum for Fugitives, and Persons of desperated Fortunes & Characters.¹¹⁵

In spite of other such character assassinations — Johnston was even accused of disloyalty to the Crown — the charges by Corbin and others came to naught as the governor presented an able defense.¹¹⁶ What Corbin sought for himself in a Johnston dismissal is unknown. In any event, Granville once again became Corbin's employer in October 1749; he commissioned Corbin and Thomas Child as his proprietary agents following the deaths of Edward Moseley and Robert Halton in North Carolina.¹¹⁷ Armed with powers of attorney for North Carolina and instructed by Granville to set the proprietary affairs in order and to open a land office in Edenton, Corbin and Child returned to the colony in 1750.

Both agents landed at Edenton, and Corbin apparently leased a plantation "several" miles from town. The exact location of this plantation remains unknown, but circumstantial evidence suggests it was just west of Edenton at the mouth of Pembroke Creek, and included the 156-acre "Strawberry Island" in Edenton Bay "opposite the town."¹¹⁸ The agents worked quickly and opened the land office by October. In spite of the animosity between Gabriel Johnston and Corbin, the governor reported to Lord Granville in November 1750:

Mr. Corbin has been very Industrious all this summer in placing the office in order and settling the accounts. He tells me he has now adjusted everything and hath all the books and papers intherein proper; he seems to have a head very well qualified for this sort of business.¹¹⁹

Besides establishing Granville's land office and putting the Earl's affairs in order, Corbin entered a trading partnership with merchant-tobacco shipper John Campbell of Bertie County, a successful merchant in the Albemarle Region.¹²⁰ By the spring

of 1751, as Child was planning a return to London, Corbin stood to become the Earl's sole resident agent. This situation was discussed by Governor Johnston in a letter to Granville of 5 March:

One of your Lords' agents [Child] takes his final leave of this province next June, and so all the business will of course fall unto the hands of the other [Corbin]. What that Gentleman's Fortune or Credit may be at Home I don't pretend to know, but unless both are tolerably good I am afraid he will be pretty much puzzled to make regular remittances, for I am told he is engaged in shipping and trade with Campbell and some others and that he has just bought a pretty deal of plate, four or five negroes, and lately all Mr. Child's Books and Furniture which in all must amount to about £400 by a very modest computation . . . but to do this Gentleman justice, I must add that he has brought your Lordships Office into most excellent order. He has sorted all the papers and brought up the books and settled all the accounts in a most clear and diligent manner.¹²¹

It should be noted that Johnston warned the Earl regarding Corbin's financial security and ability to make regular remittances, sensible advice in light of Corbin's eminent succession to a most lucrative office. Following Thomas Child's departure, Corbin did indeed assume full control of the Earl's affairs; although Corbin later was joined by a succession of co-agents, he remained the principal proprietary agent resident in the colony during the following decade.

As mentioned, Earl Granville reserved to himself all the rights of ownership to his 1/8 share of North Carolina when the Lords Proprietors sold the sovereignty of the colony back to the Crown in 1728. Granville hoped to utilize this enormous tract of land as a source of revenue by renting small tracts of it to various tenants, charging them a fee for the surveying and issuing of the land grant and then a quit rent for the purpose of occupying the land for cultivation.¹²² If it had functioned as planned, the land policy would have contributed mightily to Granville's fortune. In addition to the principal land office in Edenton, other "frontier" offices were later established at Enfield, "Corbinton" (now Hillsborough), and Salisbury. Corbin hired numerous agents to issue warrants, survey, and register grants. Corbin himself

apparently made annual trips across the Granville District, finalizing land grants and collecting outstanding fees. Since more than sixty thousand settlers moved into piedmont North Carolina during the 1750s, Granville's land agency prospered first and grew increasingly larger. It is not surprising that the agency soon attracted those who apparently were more interested in lining their pockets with quit rents rather than the Earl's. By the late 1750s the Granville land agency was fraught with corruption, and Francis Corbin, as the Earl's principal resident agent, became the natural target of complaints by the Granville district's increasingly disgruntled settlers; this situation eventually led to the Enfield Riot of 1759 and the birth of the Regulator movements that culminated at the Battle of Alamance in 1771.¹²³

The early 1750s, however, were quite prosperous and virtually untroubled for Corbin and his patron, although the Earl did warn Corbin to be "diligent and careful ('for your own sake') and to make doubly sure that all business transactions were handled "with order and requisite decency."¹²⁴ In the late summer of 1752 Corbin successfully managed Granville's sale of 98,000 acres to the Moravians, eliciting a favorable view of Corbin by Bishop Spangenberg, the emissary of Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf:

I have had the opportunity to spend several hours conversing with Mr. Corbin. He is very busy, being not only My Lord Granville's agent but also Judge of the Court of Admiralty and of the Supreme Court, not to speak of other employments; however, almost every day I have spent some hours with him, which was to my advantage. He is a walking Encyclopedia concerning North Carolina affairs, is capable, polite, and very obliging. . . . In short I think My Lord Granville has in him a capable agent, the Governor a wise councilor, and the land a just Judge. Our humble Respects to My Lord Granville for his recommendations to this man, who, so far as I can judge, is an honor to him.¹²⁵

By virtue of his commission as a proprietary agent, Corbin was given numerous appointments in North Carolina's royal government, serving at one time or another as a member of the Governor's Council, judge of the court of vice-admiralty, an associate justice in the colony's general court system, colonel of the Chowan Military Militia, and a justice in Chowan's court of

pleas and quarter sessions. In connection with his duties as Granville's land agent, Corbin was also commissioned a justice of the peace for any and all of the counties located in or created from the Earl's lands.¹²⁶ Corbin's political influence therefore was considerable. He quickly came into conflict with North Carolina's new Royal Governor, Arthur Dobbs, over a number of issues, including his own conduct as agent to Earl Granville. In fact, the ambitious Corbin and obstreperous Dobbs waged political war on each other throughout the late 1750s, and if Corbin thought Dobbs was too old and anile — Dobbs was sixty-six years of age when he arrived in the colony in 1754 — he was sorely mistaken. Following an attack by Corbin on his character in 1755, Dobbs briskly wrote Lord Granville:

However since Mr. Corbin has been pleased to attack my character unjustly, your Lordship must allow me to acquaint you to the character he bears here, and part of his management of your Lordships affairs and his conduct as one of the council. First it is said that there is no dependence on his veracity or belief to be given to his word, that for his own ends he is often guilty of misrepresentation and declaring of untruths, and he has occasioned much coldness between him and his neighbors and with many gentlemen in the country . . . and [he] expects to be allowed great liberties as being your Lordships agent. . . . As to his management of your Lordship's affairs, he carries it with a high hand to the claimant of warrants for lands; he fixed his office at Col. Haywoods' in Edgecombe County for all warrants and deeds, and no person is to be admitted but through Col. Haywood or his sons, for which money must be paid . . . to gain his friendship . . . and no person knows what fees are charged.¹²⁷

As principal resident agent, Corbin was held accountable for the abuses that were practiced on the Earl's tenants by his lieutenants, who often charged excessive fees and made illegal and arbitrary decisions regarding disputed land claims. Granville himself apparently had no inkling at first of any trouble regarding his land agency; he wrote Corbin in the summer of 1754: "I am well satisfied in your conduct and diligence in my affairs . . . the accounts and papers . . . give me an agreeable proof of your

zeal and diligence in my service that you have singly gone through so much business and so well dispatched it.¹²⁸ The depredations of Corbin's agents steadily worsened in the following years, however, and in November 1758 Edgecombe representative William Williams petitioned the General Assembly to inquire into the conduct of Francis Corbin and his co-agent at the time, Joshua Bodley. Less than two months later, an investigative committee roundly condemned the unjust exactions of the Granville land agency, calling the situation "deplorable" and censuring Corbin and Bodley for "neglect and misconduct." The assembly, however, adjourned without any redress against Corbin, which greatly enraged many of the inhabitants of the Granville District and apparently provoked the rumor that Corbin had escaped indictment because he was a bastard son of Earl Granville.¹²⁹ By early 1759 the Granville District, particularly Edgecombe, Halifax, and Granville counties, seethed with ill will towards the Earl and his proprietary underlings, and in particular towards Corbin. The Earl's tenants were not alone in their disgruntlement at the time, for Corbin had managed quite successfully to offend and upset a number of individuals with considerable political influence in the colony's affairs during the previous two years. He had reported to Granville that Dobbs was granting proprietary lands illegally, and he made an enemy of the powerful land speculator Henry Eustace McCulloch by issuing patents on a tract of McCulloch's land. McCulloch assailed Corbin as a man of "sordid, Wicked and Avaricious intention" and filed suit against him for over 8,000 in "damages."¹³⁰

Public action against Corbin was taken on the night of 24 January 1759, when Colonel Alexander McCulloch, with an extra-legal posse of about twenty men from the Edgecombe region, aroused by "the felicituous use of ardent liquors," as Corbin put it, seized the agent at his plantation just outside Edenton and forcibly carried him off to his Enfield office some seventy miles inland in Edgecombe (now Halifax) County; there the "traitorous rioters" held Corbin and his co-agent, Joshua Bodley, under armed guard until they agreed to a number of concessions for land policy reformation. After signing a bond which guaranteed his appearance at the next spring term of the Superior Court — where and when he was to refund all unjust fees taken from the people — Corbin was released by his captors unharmed. Almost gleefully, Governor Dobbs reported the incident to the Board of Trade.¹³¹

Immediately after his release, Corbin began to take steps to prosecute the rioters, and he managed to persuade Dobbs to offer a reward for the capture of his abductors. A number of rioters were arrested and jailed at Enfield, but the jail was broken open soon afterward by another “Mob” and the prisoners set free as emotions continued to run high in Edgecombe.¹³² Corbin, however, continued his efforts to prosecute the rioters, until his friend Robert Jones, then the colony’s attorney general, warned that if matters came to trial Corbin would be the principal sufferer, since he could not justify some of his actions, and that the fault would undoubtedly be laid to the charge of Corbin’s agency. The Enfield Riot, as it came to be called, was fraught with other disastrous results for Corbin as well. Besides being unsuccessful in his attempt to bring the ringleaders to justice, Corbin was stripped of all his Crown offices, including his council seat, by Governor Dobbs, who undoubtedly had been waiting for such an incident to use against Corbin. Corbin also was dismissed from the service of Lord Granville, who removed his protection and revoked his power of attorney to Corbin on 25 April 1759.¹³³ Thus rejected by the leadership on both sides of the Atlantic, Francis Corbin’s political associations with the Crown and North Carolina’s royal government came to an abrupt end.

Corbin, ever the shrewd politician, nevertheless managed to get himself elected to the General Assembly the very next year as a representative of his home county, Chowan, where his reputation apparently was not touched materially by the Enfield Riot episode. Once in the assembly, Corbin joined with Thomas Child, Robert Jones, and Thomas Barker — a group that Dobbs labeled the “Northern Junto” since they all had extensive interests in Granville’s proprietary lands — in opposing the administration of the governor at every opportunity.¹³⁴ Indeed, by the summer of 1760 Corbin had sufficiently aroused the General Assembly with his own version of the Enfield Riot that the assembly, “greatly shocked at the traitorous conspiracies of the rioters and at the arrest of the gentle Corbin,” condemned Governor Dobbs for failing to put down the “mobs, riots and insurrections that prevailed.”¹³⁵ This remarkable turnabout by the assembly — it had condemned Corbin’s conduct as Granville’s agent “deplorable” just eighteen months before — serves as a testament to Corbin’s considerable political skills. Corbin continued to represent Chowan County in the General Assembly from April 1760 to May 1765; and on 19 March 1763, he was restored by Dobbs

to his position as a justice in the colony's highest court of law, with a commission as associate justice on the bench of the Edenton District Superior Court. Corbin's remarkable political comeback was completed after the death of his old adversary Dobbs, when new Royal Governor William Tryon proposed in 1766 to readmit Corbin to the Governor's Council.¹³⁶ Corbin did not have the opportunity to resume his council duties, however, as a severe illness brought about his death in early 1767.

Although Corbin apparently preformed all of his governmental duties exceptionally well, his negligent administration of Earl Granville's proprietary affairs has not endeared him to posterity. Indeed, North Carolina historians generally have portrayed Corbin as a perfect example of the corrupt colonial official, who, in the words of one historian, "grew fat upon the extortions of his subordinates."¹³⁷ Historians have also charged on numerous occasions that Corbin and the other proprietary agents, particularly Thomas Child, sought to defraud Earl Granville through a series of complex conspiracies, and that although these conspiracies never quite worked as planned, the agents nevertheless grew rich as neither fees nor remittances of any importance were sent to Granville.¹³⁸ While it is undeniable that the continual transfer of money from agent to agent and thence to Granville certainly invited embezzlement, proprietary correspondence reveals that large-sum remittances to Granville were made regularly. If Corbin or any of the other agents were guilty of embezzlement, they evidently did not pocket the enormous sums that often have been suggested.¹³⁹ Another historian perhaps best summarized Corbin's political career when she wrote that "we are not sure that [Corbin] did anything strictly illegal; but at the same time it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was deficient in some of the qualities that make for moral uprightness and political stability."¹⁴⁰

Corbin's primary residence throughout much of his career seems to have been his Chowan County plantation located "several" miles from Edenton, the exact location of which is unknown. There are many but vague references to it throughout the records. Some refer to it as "two or three miles" from town; one letter mentions "Mr. Corbin's House five miles from Edenton"; and Governor Dobbs often referred to it as "near Edenton," or "several miles from Edenton."¹⁴¹ The Corbin plantation apparently was located at the mouth of Pembroke Creek, but Corbin also acquired large tracts of land on the "west

side of Queen Anne's Creek," and on the "northeast shore of the Chowan River," making it difficult to determine which was Corbin's manor plantation.¹⁴² Records indicate Corbin worked these plantations with a total of thirty to forty-five slaves.¹⁴³

On 19 April 1756 Corbin purchased the Cupola House and its lot from Thomas Barker for "£61.5.0 Proclamation Money." The deed described the lot as:

. . . one lot and parcel of land situate and lying and being in Edenton known and distinguished in the new plan of the said town by the number or figure one (1) containing one-half acre & all Houses Buildings and Gardens. . . .¹⁴⁴



Figure 4. Serving table, Edenton, 1745-55, mahogany with red cedar frame. HOA 25 1/8", W/OA 27 1/8", DOA 18 3/4". MRF S-3034.

Corbin may have leased the structure and lot from Thomas Barker, one of the attorneys representing the estate of William Morton, prior to the purchase. Deed records show that Corbin did not own any town property at the time, but he was under pressure from Granville and Thomas Child during this period to establish a “proper land office” in town; apparently Corbin conducted most of the Earl’s land business through the “frontier” offices, keeping most of the records at his plantation outside of town.¹⁴⁵ Following Child’s return to London in June 1751, Granville wrote Corbin:

Mr. Child having represented to me the necessity of having a proper office in Edenton for the safe lodgement of my papers & records and for your transacting my business with decency and order; I would therefore have you forthwith purchase some convenient lott in that town for me and my heirs and provide bricks and other materials and that the same may be set about as soon as the season of the year will allow. I would have one part of the house allotted for the clerks office with proper conveniences and the other to serve as an apartment for yourselves where you may commodiously transact my affairs with necessary and secure accommodations for the reception of my papers. And for this you may expand and charge my account about 80 to 100 sterling, but not to exceed that sum.¹⁴⁵

By April 1756, however, Corbin had not purchased a lot or built a “proper office” as instructed; on 18 April, just one day before Corbin purchased the Cupola House and its lot, Lord Granville wrote Corbin tersely that he was to erect “such an office out of [monies on] hand” and that it was to “be commodious, and made as secure as possible against fire and other accidents.”¹⁴⁶ Chowan deed records, however, show that Corbin never purchased a lot in the name of Granville and his heirs, and he apparently never built the “proper office” that Lord Granville desired. The Cupola House would have provided Corbin with a prominent town location on the waterfront to “commodiously transact” his patrons. If that was the case, one of the lot’s various outbuildings shown on Sauthier’s 1769 *Plan of Edenton* could have served as a land office.

Four months after his purchase of the Cupola House, Corbin acquired title to the water lot directly opposite the dwelling from

the town commissioners for ten shillings.¹⁴⁷ The deed contained the usual provision that Corbin “improve” the lot within two years, which he did by erecting a large private wharf in Edenton Bay soon afterward. This deed referred to “Francis Corbin of Edenton,” suggesting that Corbin was already resident. However, the condition and state of the Cupola House at the time Corbin purchased the dwelling is unknown. The low purchase price of £61.5.0 seems to suggest that the building perhaps was out of



Figure 5. Gaming table, attributed to Edenton, 1750-75, mahogany with walnut gate frame, red oak inner frame. HOA 26 7/8", WOA 30 3/4", DOA 31 1/8" open. MESDA acc. 2720.



Figure 6. Writing table, attributed to Edenton, 1750-75, mahogany with oak drawer frames and yellow pine bottoms, back, and inner framing, HOA 28 7/8", W/OA 36 5/8", DOA 24 1/2". MESDA acc. 3273.

repair; yet it must be remembered that Corbin purchased the Cupola House from a good friend who represented clients living in Great Britain that had never seen the dwelling and who probably had no idea of the structure's real value. The purchase price itself therefore may not have been truly indicative of the condition of the Cupola House at that time. *Editor's note: as in the earlier instance, it was felt appropriate to add further information about current property values, as follows.* Some properties in Edenton sold for a good deal less than Corbin's expenditure during the same period. For example, in July 1753 the cabinetmaker John Henry Rombough sold Samuel Davis lots 85 and 86 in the New Plan, with dwellings, "houses," outhouses, and fences for a mere £6:4:6. However, in the spring of 1755 Susanna Cockburne sold George Dishbrow lots 2, 3, and 4 in the New Plan, with "houses" and other features, for £198:3:0. In the same year that Corbin bought the Cupola House, Thomas Harrison, a merchant of Suffolk, Virginia, sold another Suffolk man lots 3 and 4 in the Old Plan, with houses, outhouses, and

other appurtenances, for £208. These are representative sale prices during the decade, ranging from low to high. In 1756, North Carolina currency was worth approximately 56 percent of a pound sterling. Although it is not stated in the deed, the Corbin purchase probably was in provincial money, indicating that he purchased the house and lot for only about £34:5 sterling. Four years later, in Williamsburg, the dwelling of James Geddy, Sr. was sold by his widow for 100 Virginia currency to James Geddy, Jr., the silversmith. At that time, the house consisted of a four-bay story-and-a-half structure, which now stands in a largely reconstructed state on Duke of Gloucester Street. At current exchange, the Geddy property sold for approximately £71 sterling.¹⁴⁸



Figure 7. Stair spandrel, George Blair house, Edenton. Blair probably built his house in Eden Alley before 1765; he died in 1769. The house was razed to make room for a medical clinic in 1957, but before it was destroyed, three of its rooms were salvaged and installed in MESDA. The carving was executed by the same cabinetmaker who produced the tables in figs. 5, 6, and 9.

The structure presumably would have been in good upkeep if Corbin was renting it prior to the purchase. Although the nature of possible repairs to the house made by Corbin is unknown, he commissioned the construction of a wharf, which apparently was completed by September 1758. It is thought by some that Corbin probably had the building thoroughly remodeled to suit his taste; in her 1965 report on the Cupola House for the Chowan County Historical Commission, Miss Moore reasoned that:

The interior trim of the Cupola House presents a special problem. Judging by all the deeds up through the time of Corbin's purchase, the house could hardly have been considered extraordinary. Surely Dr. John Brickell's description of the town in 1731 would have made a special mention of a house as fine as this was when Corbin died, and surely his silence indicates that it was not so fine then. . . . Corbin bought the place at the lowest price in its history . . . and after his death all his other Edenton property had to be sold to pay a debt of £211.6.0 still owing to a carpenter named Robert Kirshaw . . . the Cupola House woodwork implies an owner with the taste to want it, the money to pay for it (eventually), and the reasonable explanation of enjoying it. The documentary evidence points straight to Francis Corbin.¹⁴⁹

Regardless of Corbin's possible alterations of the Cupola House, he was quite wealthy, owning as mentioned various tracts of land throughout Chowan County and thirty to forty slaves.¹⁵⁰ In addition, Corbin received what was described as a "handsome and liberal allowance" from Earl Granville during his years as proprietary agent, and he received generous fees for his other governmental duties as well.¹⁵¹ Little is known about Corbin's mercantile partnership with John Campbell, but it may be assumed that it was also profitable, given Campbell's business acumen and reputation throughout the colony.¹⁵² Corbin, therefore, had the ability to furnish the Cupola House modishly.

Editor's note: Corbin's furnishings are important to the understanding of his taste and wealth, and for this and other reasons, we add the following analysis of his household goods to Mr. Cheeseman's study. The "Acct Sales of the Estate of Francis Corbin deceased Sold at Public Vendue at Edenton the 20th of September 1758" is quite revealing in regard to just how modish Corbin was. We may assume that most of his furniture was locally made, and that he had begun to bespeak work with Edenton artisans not long after his 1750 arrival in the town. The total sale value of the contents of the Cupola House and its outbuildings was £336:12:10. This sum included 24 slaves, two horses, and a riding chair. Also sold were a great variety of items, including over seventy books and a "Parcel French Books." Corbin's library was fairly typical of a well-to-do gentleman of the time, including the works of Virgil, Pliny, Shakespeare, Descartes, and others,



Figure 8. Armchair, attributed to Edenton, 1745-65, mahogany with beech rear rail, cypress glue blocks, beech slip seat. HOA 39 1/4", WOA 26 1/4" at knee, 23" at feet. MESDA acc. 2418.

along with various histories, compilations of laws, religious treatises, and popular novels such as *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*. He owned no books of architecture. He owned a Latin dictionary and two French grammars. In all, the library reveals a man who was well educated.

Household movables consisted of an array of objects predictable for an Albemarle household of the period and level of wealth.

Corbin owned 33 pewter plates, 14 dishes of the same metal, 28 china plates, 7 dishes, and a bowl, all presumably of porcelain. Of silver, he had two waiters, a bread basket, a punchbowl, a tankard, a coffee pot, and a dozen spoons. Some of these items were quite substantial. The basket sold for over £18, and the bowl for £19:13, in both instances indicating large size and heavy weight. A "Head of Grotius" along with a similar bust of the Bishop of Winchester, both probably casts, were included in the amenities of the house. A dressing glass, four looking glasses, and a small pier glass very likely represented imported wares, along with twenty "pictures." Four pairs of andirons, three fenders, four candlesticks, a generous complement of kitchen furniture, gardening implements, a "Blunderbuss" and four fowlers, a "parcel of old cutlasses," and various other household items made up the balance of the accessories.



Figure 9. Dining table, attributed to Edenton, 1750-75, walnut with oak gate frame, yellow pine inner frame. HOA 27 15/15", W/OA 42 7/8", DOA 43" open. MRF S-4623.

Corbin's actual household furniture consisted of "8 arm mahogany chairs" which sold for £8:15:10, 2 "square Mahogany tables" at £4, a "round" mahogany tea table at 2, 2 beds with furniture, one at 9 and the other at £18:16, two dressing tables,



Figure 10. Tea table, one of a pair, Edenton, 1750-80, mahogany. HOA 27 3/8", diameter of top 30 1/4". MRF S-12,173.

one at £3 and the other at £2:1, a desk at £5:5 and a desk-and-bookcase at £15, 19 side chairs, 13 of which were described as "walnut," two "smoking" chairs, a "close stool chair" which sold for £2:15, a "small square table," an "old table," a "large round Mahogany table" worth £2:13:6, and a "candle Stand" which sold for £0:6:6. Shown here are ten examples of Edenton furniture of the 1750-70 period that are representative of the sort of pieces which Corbin might have owned, although a serving table (fig. 4), card table (fig. 5), and writing table (fig. 6) such as those illustrated are not reflected on the inventory. The card table is one of a pair originally owned by Robert Jones, one of Corbin's principal agents. The cabinetmaker who produced Jones' tables had earlier carved the stair hall (fig. 7) of the c. 1764 house of merchant George Blair, who purchased Corbin's candle stand. The "8 arm mahogany chairs" are well represented by the example in fig. 8, which indeed was originally one of a set of armchairs. The "2 square mahogany tables" very likely indicated

a matched pair of dining tables such as that in fig. 9. "Square" in early inventories often actually meant "rectangular," and sets of dining tables were common in the Albemarle. The "round mahogany tea table" was purchased by Samuel Johnston, who almost certainly owned the Edenton table shown in fig. 10, although Johnston's table illustrated here is one of a pair. Corbin's walnut side chairs very likely followed familiar local work that



Figure 11. Side chair, Edenton, 1755-75, mahogany with yellow pine. HOA 37 1/4", W/OA 20 1/8". MRF S-8483.

was executed in a conservative version of the Chinese taste, as we see in figs. 11 and 12. The “smoking” chairs were corner chairs; the example illustrated in fig. 13 was owned by Samuel Dickinson, who purchased the house in 1777. The “close stool chair” would have been similar to the smoking chairs, but with a much deeper skirt. Although a simple affair, the Edenton

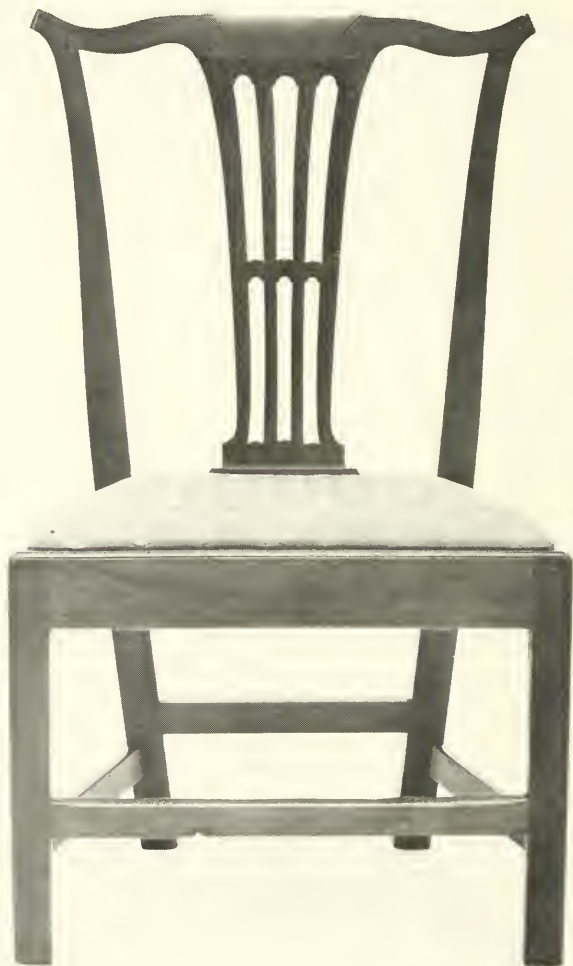


Figure 12. Side chair, Edenton, 1760-90, walnut with cypress and yellow pine blocks. HOA 37 3/8", W/OA 20 3/4", DOA 15 11/16". MRF S-3007. This chair descended in the family of Samuel Dickinson, the doctor who purchased the Cupola House from the estate of Francis Corbin in 1777.

dressing table in fig. 14 could well have answered Corbin's sale description, judging from the modest £2:1 that one table brought.



Figure 13. Corner chair, Edenton, 1760-90, walnut with white pine slip-seat support, poplar front block. HOA 31 1/16", W/OA 18 11/16", MRF S-3008. This chair has the same history as that illustrated in fig. 12.

Corbin maintained a staff of four to six slaves on the premises.¹⁵³ He no doubt found the Cupola House ideally situated, being just over a block from the courthouse where Corbin sat as an assistant justice, and its location on Edenton's waterfront, with its own private wharf, allowed Corbin ready access to water transportation as well.

Despite his poor relations with the inhabitants west of the Chowan River and with Governor Dobbs, Corbin was respected and apparently held in high esteem by his contemporaries in Edenton and Chowan County. As we have seen, the freeholders sent him to the General Assembly as their representative during

four consecutive years in the early 1760s; Reverend James Moir of Edenton, commenting on the political struggle between Dobbs and Corbin, wrote in 1763:

His excellency [Gov. Dobbs] seems to have a natural antipathy to everyone that acts uprightly in a public office. Mr. Francis Corbin, the Earl of Granville's Agent in this Province, I dare say acted conscientiously. I had frequent opportunity of observing him; His Excellency appointed a General Assembly at Edenton to demolish the said Corbin, but his efforts proved ineffectual¹⁵⁴

An Anglican, Corbin was prominent in the affairs of St. Paul's Church, serving as a vestryman and lay reader during the 1750s.¹⁵⁵ Corbin repeatedly promised to use his influence to have the church



Figure 14. Side table, attributed to Chowan River basin, 1740-60, walnut with cypress. HOA 27 1/2", WOA 27 1/8", DOA 20 3/4". MRF S-4150.

building completed; construction had begun in 1736. Corbin failed to accomplish much with this; the church, however, was completed except for a tower in 1760.¹⁵⁶ Personally, Corbin referred to himself as the "Honorable Francis Corbin, Esquire and Gentleman." His health was poor, perhaps affected by Edenton's climate, and he was apparently often ill for long durations. Corbin mentioned in a letter to Lord Granville of 18 February 1754 that: "I have been in a bad state of health for a considerable time past. . . ." and one month later he wrote: "This has been the most sickly and mortal season for many years; near one-half of the people in & about here [Edenton] are dead; two & three out of a house, and some whole families; and our misfortune is, the disorder is not yet over."¹⁵⁷ After an illness of over three months, Corbin recovered, writing Granville on 13 April: "I thank God I begin to recover my health. . . ." However, Corbin was so weakened by the unidentified sickness that he could not make the circuit ride out to Enfield, Hillsborough, and Salisbury that summer.¹⁵⁸

In October 1761 Francis Corbin married Jean Innes of New Hanover County, the widow of Colonel James Innes (d. 1759) who had served briefly as one of Corbin's co-agents prior to his distinguished service in the French and Indian war.¹⁵⁹ Jean Innes was apparently many years Corbin's senior, and she was described by a contemporary as "not of the best character or most amiable manners."¹⁶⁰ She was, however, very wealthy. The Innes plantation, Point Pleasant, stood on a magnificent bluff overlooking the Cape Fear River, and it consisted of over 1,600 acres along the river banks, worked by 100 slaves.¹⁶¹ The shrewd Mrs. Innes retained control of this estate, as specified by the terms of a lengthy pre-nuptial agreement between Corbin and herself which stated that Point Pleasant was to be "for her separate use and benefit exclusive of the said Francis Corbin . . . the same in any part thereof shall not be subject ot the control, disposition, debts, forfeitures, engagements, incumbrances, or contracts of the said Francis Corbin her intended husband."¹⁶² Likewise, Corbin kept exclusive control of his Chowan estate, but upon his death the estate was to descend to "the use and behalf of the said Jean Innes his intended wife for and during the term of her natural life."¹⁶³ After her death the estate was to revert to Corbin's heirs. The agreement also specified that the Cupola House be rented out during the absence of the Corbins, and later records reveal that Dr. Walter Ferguson, a prominent Edenton physician of the

1760s and 1770s, managed Corbin's Chowan estate while Corbin was at Point Pleasant. However, no rental records concerning the Cupola House were found. Corbin himself was often in Edenton during 1761-65, and he presumably stayed at the Cupola House when in town.¹⁶⁴ After 1765 Corbin spent most of his time at Point Pleasant; he died there in early 1767. According to Janet Schaw, a visitor to Point Pleasant in the 1770s, he was buried at the bottom of the lawn on the plantation, not far from the grave of Colonel Innes.¹⁶⁵

Corbin died before making a last will and testament, and his wife qualified as administratrix on 27 October 1767, giving security of £5,000 "for the true administration of the estate."¹⁶⁶ Although most of Francis Corbin's estate records have not survived, it appears that the estate carried a certain burden of debt, and Mrs. Corbin received permission from the court on 24 June 1768 to "sell so much of the said deceased's personal estate as will pay his just debts."¹⁶⁷ During that summer Jean Corbin repeatedly advertised the upcoming estate sale in the *Virginia Gazette*.¹⁶⁸ One sale was held on Tuesday, 20 September 1768 and an additional sale was conducted on 3 November. The numerous items in Corbin's personal estate, including 26 slaves, were sold for over £1,200. The account of the sale reveals that Edenton's and Chowan's most prominent citizens attended the auction, which was held on the grounds of the Cupola House lot. Samuel Johnston came from Hayes, Joseph Blount from Mulberry Hill, Richard Brownrigg from Wingfield, Daniel Earle from Brandon. Among the Edentonians at the sale were Joseph Hewes, Jasper Charlton, and George Blair.¹⁶⁹ The Cupola House once again stood vacant, destined to serve as Jean Corbin's rental property. The occupancy of the Cupola House's most controversial owner had come to an end.

Although Edenton lost the honor of being the seat of the colony's government to New Bern in 1746, the town prospered greatly during the years the Cupola House served as Corbin's townhouse. At the eve of the American Revolution the town consisted of approximately 177 dwellings and a diverse contingent of artisans. The waterfront seethed with activity. Edenton's thriving maritime commerce attracted money and men of influence, and a significant amount of construction took place during this period.¹⁷⁰

In June 1769 C. J. Sauthier, a French cartographer commissioned by Governor William Tryon to prepare a series of maps

of North Carolina's towns, completed a map of Edenton. The detailed plan shows that Edenton extended back about eight blocks north from the waterfront; the map clearly depicts the Cupola House and its lot. Six outbuildings are shown upon the half-acre lot, four standing behind the house on the north and two in front. The largest building, probably the kitchen, stood immediately to the rear of the Cupola House, juxtaposed at a right angle with the northwest side of the house. Later records indicate that the kitchen was a large two-story brick structure, and the servant's quarters were probably located on the second floor above the cooking area. Part of this structure, or one of the other dependencies, may also have served as a coach house, as Mrs. Corbin's inventory later listed a "pleasure carriage" in storage at Edenton.¹⁷¹ Immediately behind the kitchen stood two much smaller structures, perhaps a privy and a smokehouse. A small dependency, perhaps an office, also stood in the center of the lot on King Street. On the southern portion of the lot in front of the Cupola House, Sauthier depicted a garden area running the length of the lot south to Water Street, where two small buildings stood on the southeast and southwest corners of the lot. Across Water Street was the lot's wharf, jutting into Edenton Bay. In all, the Cupola House must have been a profitable piece of rental property for Jean Corbin during the late 1760s and early 1770s.

As administratrix of her late husband's financially troubled estate, Jean Innes Corbin became involved in a number of lawsuits, as both plaintiff and defendant, while attempting to settle the estate.¹⁷² One of these lawsuits is of particular interest to the debate surrounding the question of whether or not Francis Corbin extensively remodeled the Cupola House. In November 1770 Robert Kirshaw, an Edenton carpenter, filed suit against "Jean Corbin, administratrix of all & Singular the Goods Chattles Rights & Credits which were of Francis Corbin, Esquire, deceased" seeking to recover "six hundred pounds Proclamation Money which to him she owes."¹⁷³ Little is known of Robert Kirshaw, who died in 1772. His name first appears in the Chowan County records about 1749-50, and he seems to have been a man of very modest means. Apparently illiterate, Kirshaw did not own any real property in Edenton or Chowan County.¹⁷⁴ Nothing is known of his work, except that he was not a well-known artisan in the area. His name does not appear in newspaper advertisements or apprentice indentures. In any event, "Robert Kirshaw vs. Francis

Corbin's Adm.'" came before the Edenton District Superior Court on 5 May 1772, and a twelve-man jury awarded Kirshaw 211.6.0.¹⁷⁵ The court minutes, however, unfortunately do not discuss the nature of Corbin's debt to Kirshaw, and Robert Kirshaw's deposition apparently has not survived. Since Kirshaw was not engaged in any known business transactions with Corbin other than possible carpentry work, the suit suggests that Kirshaw indeed performed services of that trade for which he was never paid. It is possible, then, that Corbin commissioned Kirshaw to renovate the Cupola House and build the lot's wharf. Unfortunately, surviving documentary sources provide no description of Kirshaw's presumed work. As a result of the jury's verdict, Jean Corbin was forced to sell several tracts of Francis Corbin's Chowan County lands, including the plantation at the mouth of Pembroke Creek and Strawberry Island, to raise the money needed to pay Kirshaw, who died shortly after winning the suit.¹⁷⁶

Jean Corbin died at Point Pleasant in 1775, and ownership of the Cupola House reverted to Francis Corbin's next-of-kin as stipulated by the marriage agreement of October 1761.¹⁷⁷ During the eight years (1767-75) the Cupola House was solely owned by Jean Corbin, it apparently served as rental property, as nothing in the records even suggests that Mrs. Corbin ever utilized the house for herself. No records were found, however, that reveal details regarding leases of the Cupola House during the period. After Jean Corbin's death, administration of Francis Corbin's estate was granted to Edmund Corbin, apparently Corbin's brother, who therefore qualified as his next-of-kin.¹⁷⁸ A Wilmington merchant and loyalist, Edmund Corbin sold the Cupola House and its lot and adjoining water lot and wharf to Dr. Samuel Dickinson on 7 February 1777 for £400. The deed description read:

. . . a certain lott or half acre of land together with the water lott wharf Houses tenaments Buildings and Appurtenances and Improvements situate lying & being in the Town of Edenton in Plan of said Town known and distinguished by Lott No. 1. . . .¹⁷⁹

The significantly increased purchase price reflected the value of the water lot and wharf, the initial stages of Revolutionary War inflation, and possible improvements to the property by Corbin. Like Corbin, Samuel Dickinson was also a prominent and con-

troversial figure during his lifetime; the Cupola House was to serve as the residence of his family and descendants for the ensuing 141 years.

FOOTNOTES

1. See, among others, Thomas Tileston Waterman and Frances Benjamin Johnston, *The Early Architecture of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); Henry Chandlee Forman, *The Architecture of the Old South: The Medieval Style, 1585-1850* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1948); Thomas Tileston Waterman, *The Dwellings of Colonial America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950); Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952); John V. Allcott, *Colonial Homes in North Carolina* (Raleigh, N. C.: Carolina Tercentary Commission, 1963); Lawrence Wodehouse, *Architecture in North Carolina, 1700-1900* (Raleigh, N. C.: North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, 1970).
2. On 10 March 1918 ten citizens of Edenton and the surrounding community met "to organize an association for the purchase and preservation of the Cupola House, and the Cupola House Library and Museum Association was then organized as a stock company. Efforts to preserve four other historic buildings in North Carolina predate the formation of the Cupola House Association; however, these were the work of either previously organized groups or various local chapters of national organizations. The Cupola House Association was the first community-organized agency established to save a specific structure in North Carolina. Minutes of the Cupola House Association, 1918-49, 1; Cupola House Association files, Edenton; A. L. Honeycutt, Jr., Supervisor, Restoration and Preservation Services Branch, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, State Division of Archives and History, interviews with author, 24 Oct. and 5 Nov. 1979; hereafter cited as Honeycutt interviews.
3. *Chowan Herald* (Edenton), 18 Aug. 1966; *Virginian Pilot* (Norfolk, Va.), 10 Oct. 1965.

4. C. J. Sauthier, 1769 *Plan of the Town and Port of Edenton, North Carolina*, photostatic copy, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; Donald H. Parker, landscape architect, Williamsburg, Va., interview with author, 5 Dec. 1979, hereafter cited as Parker interview.
5. See David Leroy Corbitt, ed., *Explorations, Descriptions, and Attempted Settlements of Carolina, 1584 to 1590* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1948); David Beers Quinn, ed., *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1955); Thomas C. Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony: The History of Chowan County and Edenton, North Carolina*, (Edenton: Chamber of Commerce, 1967), 5-10.
6. Hugh T. Lefler and William S. Powell, *Colonial North Carolina: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 29-32; William S. Powell, ed., *Ye Countie of Albemarle in Carolina: A Collection of Documents, 1664-1675* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1958), xiii-xxiv. For descriptions of the Chowan region from some of the Virginia explorations, see Hugh T. Lefler, ed., *North Carolina History told by Contemporaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 12-13.
7. Lefler and Powell, *Colonial North Carolina*, 31-2; Powell, *Ye Countie of Albemarle*, xiii-xxiii.
8. Lefler and Powell, *Colonial North Carolina*, 32; Powell, *Ye Countie of Albemarle*, xxiii. For a bibliographical sketch of Captain Samuel Stevens, see Beth G. Crabtree, *North Carolina Governors, 1585-1968* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1968), 5-6.
9. Actually, the settled region of the Albermarle mistakenly was omitted from the 1663 charter, which granted the territory extending from 31° to 36° north latitude and stretching from ocean to ocean to eight men who had made considerable contributions to King Charles II's restoration. The error was corrected by a second charter granted in 1665, which established the northern Carolina boundary as approximately the same as the present-day North Carolina-Virginia state line. For an account of the two charters and biographical sketches of the eight Lords Proprietors, see William S. Powell, *The Carolina Charter of 1663* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Arhives and History, 1954). For a biographical sketch of Governor William Drummond, see Crabtree, *North Carolina Governors*, 3-4.
10. David Leroy Corbitt, *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties, 1663-1943* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1969), xxiv. The precinct was named in honor of Anthony Ashley Cooper, one of the original Lords Proprietors.
11. Corbitt, *Formation*, xxiv; Lefler and Powell, *Colonial North Carolina*, 44-5, Powell, *Ye Countie of Albemarle*, xxi-xxxii; Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 12. Chowan "Precinct" became Chowan County in 1739. Corbitt, *Formation*, xx.
12. See Margaret M. Hofmann, comp. and ed., *Province of North Carolina, 1663-1729: Abstracts of Land Patents* (Weldon, N. C.: Roanoke News Company, 1979). This extensive research effort indicates that the region may have been more heavily settled than previously has been believed.

13. J. R. B. Hathaway, ed., *North Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*, 2 (1901):350, 358; 3 (1902):200-2, 207, hereafter cited as *NCH&GR*; Chowan County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Chowan County Courthouse, Edenton, Book W-1, 6; Elizabeth Vann Moore, Edenton, interviews with author, 24-27 Sept. 1979; hereafter cited as Moore interviews. Hoskins's land patent itself has not survived, but is referred to in later deeds.
14. *NCH&GR*, 2:350, 398; Chowan County Deeds, Bk. W-1, 6; Moore interviews.
15. *Ibid.*. For a biographical sketch of Nathaniel Chevin (d. 1720) see William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979-), 1(A-C), 366.
16. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. B-1, 62-3. Thomas Cary (d. 1720), Deputy Governor and Council President, was born in England and became a successful merchant in Charleston in the early eighteenth century. In 1710 Cary lost his political skirmish with Edward Hyde for the governorship of North Carolina and "became an open and declared rebel and brought together a gang of tramps and rioters in open rebellion against Hyde." Governor Spotswood of Virginia came to Hyde's assistance, captured Hyde, and ended the rebellion. For a biographical sketch of Thomas Cary, see Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:338-9.
17. Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, 16 vols, 11-26 (Winston and Goldsboro, N. C.: State of North Carolina, 1895-1906), 25:168; Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 15.
18. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. W-1, 6; Moore interviews. Thomas Peterson (d. 1715) was a merchant and citizen of Chowan; his father had emigrated from Maryland in 1677.
19. Edward Moseley's 1733 *Map of North Carolina*, a photocopy of which is in the N. C. State Archives, clearly depicts the Virginia Road leading to Edenton.
20. The vestry of St. Paul's parish was established in 1701 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and is the oldest in the state. Its first church building was located east of Edenton on what is now Hayes plantation and served the parish until construction began on the building that stands in Edenton today. Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 14-15.
21. William S. Price, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Higher Court Minutes, 1709-1723*, vol. 5 of *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, N. C.: Division of Archives and History, 1975), xiii, 147-8.
22. Elizabeth Van Moore, *Report on the Cupola House for the Edenton and Chowan County Historical Commission* (N.p.: Privately printed, 1965), 1-3; Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 15; Clark, *State Records*, 25:175-8.
23. Moore, *Cupola House Report*, 1-3; Moore interviews.
24. Clark, *State Records*, 25:175-8.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Price, *Minutes*, xiii.
27. *Ibid.*; Charles Christopher Crittenden, *The Commerce of North Carolina, 1763-1789* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 70-1, 77-8; Harry

- Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Historical Geography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 147-8. In exports, approximately 2/5 of the total tonnage cleared Port Roanoke for the West Indies, 1/3 sailed up the coast to New England, New York, and Baltimore, and 1/5 cleared for England. For imports, 1/2 of the tonnage came from New England, 1/4 from the West Indies, 1/5 from Great Britain, and 1/5 came from Spain and other ports. In the last six months of 1729 more than 60 vessels cleared Edenton. Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 19-20.
28. William Byrd, *Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, ed. W. K. Boyd (Raleigh, N. C.: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929), 96-8; Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 16-18.
 29. John Brickell, *The Natural History of North Carolina* (1737, reprint, Murfreesboro, N. C.: Johnson Publishing Co., 1968), 8. Dr. Brickell, an Irishman, also wrote a lively portrayal of Edenton's social life in the 1730s: town inhabitants apparently had no trouble finding time for gambling, cock-fighting, hunting, fishing, wrestling, dancing, and horse-racing, "for which they have Race-Paths near every town, and in many parts of the country."
 30. Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 22-3.
 31. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 1.
 32. J. Bryan Grimes, "Some Short Colonial Biographies," *North Carolina Day Programs* (Raleigh, N. C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1904), 81; John L. Cheney, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585-1984: A Narrative and Statistical History . . .* (Raleigh, N. C.: North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, 1975).
 33. Byrd, *Dividing Line*, 47.
 34. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 1.
 35. P. Hartmus, *Plan of the Town of Edenton*, photostatic copy, N. C. State Archives.
 36. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 1.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. *Ibid.*, Pt. 2 (numerous listings).
 40. *Ibid.*, Pt. 2, 40.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. For biographies of Christopher Gale (ca. 1680-1734), see Samuel A. Ashe and others, eds., *Biographical History of North Carolina: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 8 vols. (Greensboro, N. C.: Charles L. Van Noppen, 1905-1917), 1:292-3; Marshall Delancey Wood, *Builders of the Old North State*, ed. Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, N. C.: Litho Industries, Inc., 1968), 21-5; Ursula Fogleman Loy and Pauline Marion Worthy, eds., *Washington and the Pamlico* (Washington, N. C.: Washington-Beaufort County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 414-16.
 43. Gale's plantation on Queen Anne's Creek is shown on Moseley's 1733 *Map of North Carolina*.
 44. *New England Historical and Genealogical Review*, 47 (1893):350.

45. "The Indians of Southern Virginia, 1650-1711: Depositions in the Virginia and North Carolina Boundary Case," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 7 (April 1900):347-8.
46. Hugh F. Rankin, *Upheaval in Albemarle: The Story of Culpeper's Rebellion, 1675-1689* (Raleigh, N. C.: Carolina Charter Tercentary Commission, 1962), 73-4.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, 74.
49. *Ibid.*, 41.
50. Cheney, *North Carolina Government*, 11-16.
51. Mattie Erma Edwards Parker, ed., *North Carolina Higher-Court Records, 1670-1696*, vol. 2 of *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1968), 11-18.
52. Louis des Cognets, Jr., comp. *English Duplicates of Lost Virginia Records* (Princeton: Louis des Cognets, Jr., 1958), 281, 293.
53. Jacqueline H. Wolf, "Patents and Tithables in Proprietary North Carolina, 1663-1729," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 56 (July 1979):273.
54. Mattie Erma Edwards Parker, *North Carolina Higher Court Records, 1697-1701*, vol 3 of *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1971), 34-5.
55. Wolf, "Patents," 273.
56. Richard Sanderson, Sr., served on the Anglican vestry of Currituck Parish from the time it was organized until his death in 1718, and he supported the establishment of the Anglican Church and the imposition of political disabilities on dissenters during their political struggles of the early 1700s. As for his known children, other than Richard, Jr., Joseph (d. 1746) became a leading citizen of Currituck and had seven children; daughter Cesiah married Henry Woodhouse, and they had a son, Hezekiah; and daughter Susanna married first Benjamin Tullie, a Currituck ship owner, and second, one Erwin. Currituck, Pasquotank, and Perquimans Wills and Estates Papers; Colonial Court Records, Estates Papers, Wills, Sanderson folders, N. C. State Archives.
57. Price, *Minutes*, 7.
58. *Ibid.*, 170.
59. *Ibid.*, 190, 214, 243.
60. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. B-1, 577.
61. Cognets, *English Duplicates*, 281-94. Sanderson, Jr. also captained the sloop *Samuel of North Carolina* (3 tons) owned by Henry Slade and the sloop *Adventure of North Carolina* (10 tons) owned by brother-in-law Benjamin Tullie, among others.
62. Parker, *Records*, 3:101, 198.
63. *Ibid.*, 198, 218.
64. Price, *Minutes*, 482-3.
65. David Stick, *The Outer Banks of North Carolina, 1584-1958* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 32, 289, 314.

66. *Ibid.*; Secretary of State Papers, Wills, vol. 27, 62, N. C. State Archives; also see the Hayes Collection (microfilm), Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, Reel 1, folders 1-6.
67. Stick, *Outer Banks*, 314; Sanderson's fleet also included at one time the *Lark* (10 tons), and the *Thomas* (8 tons). In his West Indies trade he dealt with an apparent kinsman, Basil Sanderson, an Antigua shipmaster and trader. Profits of 300 were not uncommon for a successful voyage and cargo transfer in the early 18th century. See Chowan County Personal Accounts, 1720-9, N. C. State Archives.
68. Stick, *Outer Banks*, 314.
69. Price, *Minutes*, 75; Secretary of State Papers, Wills, 27:62.
70. Price, *Minutes*, 75.
71. Parker, *Records*, 2:255.
72. Cheney, *North Carolina Government*, 16, 29.
73. *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 4 (July 1896):85.
74. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. F-1, 204. Ruth Laker Minge Sanderson was a daughter of Benjamin Laker (d. 1701) and widow of James Minge (d. 1724). Her sister, Sarah, widow of Thomas Harvey (d. 1699) married Christopher Gale. Their son, Miles, was a sea captain, apparently employed at times by Sanderson; Miles married Hannah Yeats of Boston and lived for a time in New England. Moore interviews.
75. See Ruth Sanderson's will in J. Bryan Grimes, ed., *Abstracts of North Carolina Wills* (Raleigh, N. C.: E. M. Uzzel, 1910), 327.
76. Richard Sanderson III, captain of many of his father's ships, died in 1737; his widow and administratrix, Hannah, sold much of his estate to discharge debts. Grace (d. 1744) married Tullie Williams of Albermarle, and Elizabeth was married thrice: first to John Crisp, son of Nicholas Crisp (d. 1727) of Chowan, then to Thomas Pollock, son of Governor Thomas Pollock, and finally to Samuel Scolley of New England. Bertie and Perquimans Estates Papers, Wills; Secretary of State Papers, Colonial Court Records; Estates Papers, Sanderson folders, N. C. State Archives.
77. Richard Sanderson IV (d. 1772), owner of the sloop *Charming Betsy* and other ships, married Elizabeth Barkliff in 1755; they lived on a plantation (perhaps the original homestead) in Perquimans. Their son, Richard V (d. 1804), married Sarah Ryan and later Martha Puga, establishing a large plantation near Durant's Neck in Perquimans. Richard V's son, Richard VI, died without heirs in 1816, and the Sanderson estate in Perquimans became the object of numerous law suits filed by his brothers and sisters. Perquimans County Estates Papers, Sanderson folders, N. C. State Archives.
78. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 40.
79. *Ibid.*, 1, 36, 40.
80. *Ibid.*, 52.
81. If so, the Crisps did not occupy the dwelling for long. John Crisp died shortly after their marriage, and Elizabeth Sanderson Crisp moved to Bertie County after she married Thomas Pollack. Bertie and Perquimans Estates Papers, Wills; Secretary of State Papers; Sanderson folders, N. C. State Archives.

82. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 52.
83. The Edenton values were derived from entries in Chowan County Deed Book C-1, pages 43, 44, and 65 respectively. The sale price of the Brush house is courtesy of Patricia Gibbs, Historian, Department of Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; colonial exchange rates may be found in John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1660-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1978)]; Moore, *Cupola House Report*, 9-10; Moore interviews.
84. William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 10 vols. (Raleigh, N. C.: State of North Carolina, 1886-90) 2:497-9.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Ibid.*, 3:30, 122.
88. *Ibid.*, 30.
89. She may have been related to the Badham family of early Edenton. Moore interviews.
90. Adam Cockburne's deposition of 10 January 1726 referred to the dwelling as "Mr. Dunston's House." See *NCH&GR*, 3 (1902):229-31.
91. Chowan County Wills (original), John Dunston Folder, N. C. State Archives.
92. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 63.
93. *Ibid.*, 75.
94. Martha Dunston (d. 1736) never remarried, although she apparently had two more children after her husband's death. In all there were four Dunston children: sons Barnaby Healy and Richard William, both of whom were joiners in Bertie, and daughters Elenor and Mary. Moore interviews; Chowan County Deeds, Bk. E-1, 319.
95. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. C-1, Pt. 2, 77.
96. *Ibid.*, Bk. H-1, 97-8.
97. *Ibid.*, Bk. C-1, Pt., 77; Bk. H-1, 94-6; Chowan County Miscellaneous Papers, 20 vols., 2:92, N. C. State Archives.
98. See Oscar Bark, Jr., and Hugh T. Lefler, *Colonial America*, 2nd. ed. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1970), 360-5.
99. Albemarle County Papers, 2:66, N. C. State Archives.
100. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 94-6.
101. *Ibid.*, Bk. A-1, 99. This lot was vacant, however, when granted by the commissioners of Edenton to Montgomery in 1742.
102. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 94-6. William Morton's sister, Elizabeth, was the wife of Reverend William Graham, also of Northumberland County.
103. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 94-6. The Grahams had the Pecks pay all the expenses of hiring Messrs. Barker, Cathcart, and Granden, even though Elizabeth Graham was the administratrix of her brother's estate.
104. Brickell, *Natural History*, 14.
105. Robert W. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle: Settlement of the Northwest Carolina Frontier, 1747-1762* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

- 1964), 6; see also E. Merton Coulter, *The Granville District* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1914). For a brief biographical sketch of John Carteret (1690-1763), Earl of Granville, see Alan Valentine, *The British Establishment, 1760-1784: An Eighteenth-Century Biographical Dictionary*, 2 vols. (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 1:150-1.
106. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:431-2. The author also thanks Mr. George Stevenson of the North Carolina State Archives for kindly sharing his research on Francis Corbin.
 107. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:431-2; Granville District Papers, 1729-1780 (microfilm copy from the Marquis of Bath's Library, Longleat Library), N. C. State Archives, cited with permission from Lord Bath.
 108. *NCH&GR*, 3:239-42. Col. Edward Moseley (d. 1749), President of the Governor's Council, Acting Governor, Speaker of the Assembly, and Surveyor General of the Province, was originally a resident of Chowan and Edenton; he surveyed the original town plan in 1712. In 1730 he moved to New Hanover County where he acquired an extensive estate. His antecedents are unknown, but he was probably a member of the Moseley family of Princess Anne County, Virginia. See William S. Price, Jr., "Men of Good Estates: Wealth Among North Carolina's Royal Councillors," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 49 (Jan. 1972):71-82.
 109. *NCH&GR*, 3:241-2.
 110. *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 16 Dec. 1745; Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432.
 111. Ramsey, *Carolina Cradle*, 6, 23.
 112. *NCH&GR*, 3:241; Granville District Papers.
 113. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; Granville District Papers.
 114. *Ibid.*
 115. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 4:925-6.
 116. *Ibid.*, 925-50. Gabriel Johnston (1699-1752) served as governor for eighteen years (1734-52). Blackwell P. Robinson, *The Five Royal Governors of North Carolina, 1729-1775* (Raleigh, N. C.: Carolina Charter Tercentary Commission, 1963), 13-26.
 117. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; Granville District Papers.
 118. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 213-16; Bk. Q-1, 11-14; New Hanover County Deeds, Bk. E, 88-94.
 119. Gabriel Johnston to Lord Granville, 10 Nov. 1750, Granville District Papers.
 120. John Campbell to Granville, 18 May 1749; Johnston to Granville, 5 Mar. 1751, Granville District Papers. For Campbell's biography, see Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:315-16.
 121. Johnston to Granville, 5 Mar. 1751, Granville District Papers.
 122. Coulter, *Granville District*, 33-56. Granville rented his lands upon payment of three shillings sterling followed by an annual rent of three shillings sterling or four shillings proclamation money for each 100 acres granted.

123. Coulter, *Granville District*, 33-56; William S. Powell, James K. Huhta, and Thomas J. Farnham, comps. and eds., *The Regulators in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1759-1776* (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1971), xv-xxvii, 4-15.
124. Granville to Francis Corbin and Benjamin Wheatley, 19 July 1754, 8 Aug. 1754, Granville District Papers.
125. Adelaide L. Fries and others, eds., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, 11 vols. (Raleigh, N. C.: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1922-69), 2:517-18.
126. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; for a complete listing of Corbin's political offices, see Cheney, *North Carolina Government*.
127. Arthur Dobbs to Granville, 29 Nov. 1755, Granville District Papers.
128. Granville to Corbin and Wheatley, 19 July 1754, 8 Aug. 1754, Granville District Papers.
129. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 5:1088-94; Joseph Kelly and John L. Bridges, *History of Edgecombe County* (Raleigh, N. C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1920), 75-83; Coulter, *Granville District*, 33-56; Dobbs to Thomas Child, 5 Feb. 1759, Granville District Papers.
130. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 5: 778-81, 6:292-300.
131. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 5:lvi-lix, 6:292-300; Turner and Bridges, *Edgecombe County*, 75-83.
132. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 5:lvi-lix, 6:292-300; Turner and Bridges, *Edgecombe County*, 80-1.
133. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 5:lix, 6:292-300; Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432.
134. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; Desmond Clark, *Arthur Dobbs, Esquire, 1689-1765* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 155-7.
135. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 5:lvi-lix, 6:292-300.
136. Powell, *N. C. Biography*, 1:432; Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 7:159.
137. Turner and Bridges, *Edgecombe County*, 79.
138. Coulter, *Granville District*, 33-56; Turner and Bridges, *Edgecombe County*, 75-83.
139. Granville District Papers. Much of the money was sent to Granville in Virginia currency through Virginia governor Robert Dinwiddie. North Carolina currency was virtually worthless in England, and Granville would not accept it. See R. A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie*, 2 vols. (Richmond, Va.: Virginia Historical Society, 1933-4), index.
140. Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, ed. Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McClean Andrews (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1921), 287.
141. Granville to Corbin and Wheatley, 18 Apr. 1756, Granville District Papers; Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 6:298-9.
142. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 172-3, 213-16; Bk. L-1, 22-6; Price, "Men of Good Estates," 71-82. In his later marriage agreement with Jean

- Innes, however, Corbin only mentioned his Pembroke-Strawberry Island lands, "with houses, outhouses, and improvements," which suggests that the tract was his manor plantation.
143. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 94-8.
 144. Granville to Corbin and James Innes, 15 Nov. 1751, Granville to Corbin and Wheatley, 18 Apr. 1756, Granville District Papers.
 145. Granville to Corbin and Innes, 15 Nov. 1751, Granville District Papers.
 146. Granville to Corbin and Wheatley, 18 Apr. 1756, Granville District Papers.
 147. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. H-1, 99-100.
 148. Elizabeth Vann Moore researched the Edenton property sales; the examples cited are from Chowan County Deed Book G-1, p.113, and Book H-1, pages 4, 78. The Geddy information was provided by Patricia Gibbs of Colonial Williamsburg; the 1756 exchange rate for North Carolina and the 1760 rate for Virginia are from tables in McCusker, *Money and Exchange*. Sauthier, 1769 *Plan of Edenton*.
 149. Moore, *Cupola House Report*, 9-10.
 150. Price, "Men of Good Estates," 71-82.
 151. Granville to Corbin and Wheatley, 8 Aug. 1754, Granville District Papers.
 152. Powell, N. C. *Biography*, 1:315-16.
 153. Colonial Court Records, Estates Papers, Jean Corbin folder.
 154. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 6:979.
 155. Minutes of the Vestry for St. Paul's Church, microfilm copy, N. C. State Archives; Clement Hall, *A Collection of Many Christian Experiences*, ed. William S. Powell (Raleigh, N. C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1961), 12-15. See also Edgar L. Pennington, *The Church of England and the Reverend Clement Hall in Colonial North Carolina* (Hartfield, Conn: Church Missions Publishing Co., 1937).
 156. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, 4:925; Hall, *Christian Experiences*, 12-15.
 157. Corbin to Granville, 13 Feb. 1754, 19 Mar. 1754, Granville District Papers.
 158. *Ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1754.
 159. New Hanover County Deeds, Bk. E, 88-94. Colonel James Innes (1700-1759) was born in Cannisbay, Caithness, Scotland, and apparently came to North Carolina with Gabriel Johnston in 1734. He distinguished himself as the commander of the colonial forces during the French and Indian War, and he served as Corbin's co-agent from 1751-4.
 160. Schaw, *Journal of a Lady*, 157.
 161. New Hanover County Deeds, Bk. E, 88-94; Colonial Court Records, Jean Corbin folder.
 162. New Hanover County Deeds, Bk. E, 91.
 163. *Ibid.*, 92.
 164. Corbin regularly attended the meetings of the Edenton District Superior Court during these years, and he was an associate justice of the court from 1763-5. Minutes of the Edenton District Superior Court, 1760-82, N. C. State Archives.

165. Schaw, *Journal of a Lady*, 171.
166. Minutes of the Chowan County Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1766-72, pages not numbered, microfilm copy, N. C. State Archives, hereafter cited as Chowan C. C. P.
167. *Ibid.*
168. *Virginia Gazette*, 11 Aug. 1768.
169. Account of the Sales of the Estate of Frances Corbin, 20 Sept. 1768, xerox, Historic Edenton Visitors Center — Thomas Barker House, Edenton.
170. Parramore, *Cradle of the Colony*, 22-30.
171. Colonial Court Records, Estates Papers, Jean Corbin folder. The Chowan County tax lists for the early 1770s list the carriage ("4 wheels") as well. Chowan County tax lists, 1770-9, N. C. State Archives.
172. Colonial Court Records, Estates Papers, Francis Corbin folder; Chowan C. C. P., 1766-72, Edenton Superior Court Minutes, 1760-82.
173. Colonial Court Records, Estates Papers, Francis Corbin folder.
174. Chowan County Wills (original), Robert Cashaw folder. Robert Kirshaw's written name appears in many forms throughout the Chowan County Records, including Kershaw, Carshaw, and Cashaw.
175. Edenton Superior Court Minutes, 1760-82, 74-5. The court minutes read "Jury Impaneled & Sworn say the debt, hath paid L388.14 and all/interest to 31st May 1770. Residue unpaid, debt, hath not fully adm."
176. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. Q-1, 11-16.
177. New Hanover County Deeds, Bk. E, 88-94. Mrs. Corbin was buried between the graves of her two husbands. Point Pleasant was destroyed by fire in 1783. Schaw, *Journal of a Lady*, 171.
178. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. R-1, 41-2. Very little is known about Edmund Corbin. He described himself as a "Merchant of the Cape Fear." As he was a loyalist, he probably sold the Cupola House to avoid its confiscation; in 1780 he petitioned the assembly in protest of the confiscation acts. Apparently he left North Carolina shortly thereafter, for in 1783 Thomas Craike of Wilmington became the Corbin estate administrator. Clark, *State Records*, 15:203-4; New Hanover Court Minutes, 1771-85, 96, 109.
179. Chowan County Deeds, Bk. R-1, 41-2.



Figure 1. Cupola House, front (south) elevation. MESDA research file (MRF) S-13,560. All MESDA photographs of the Cupola House are from this research file and were taken by John Bivins. All other illustrations shown here, including interior views and radiographs, are of the Cupola House unless otherwise noted.

*The Cupola House:
An Anachronism of Style and Technology*

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The accurate analysis of any cultural object as a document of chronology, style, and technology places a special burden upon the individuals who undertake such a study. Evaluating the evidence provided by such an object requires an understanding of the experience of the artisan and his patron rather than just the experience of the modern scholar. The products of some trades are particularly difficult to probe, especially when they must be taken as a single example with few or no comparative samples available. Early buildings are one of these, and the problem is compounded by the complexity of the building trade itself. In an urban or densely-populated environment, it is possible to establish a comparative catalog of details shared by a group of structures surviving from a specific time frame. In the absence of an urban setting or regional school of architecture of a given period, determining the date of construction and stylistic antecedents of a dwelling can be difficult.

The Cupola House, in the architectural sense, is considered to be North Carolina's most significant early frame dwelling. Its presentation to the public, therefore, should be as accurate as possible, since education must deal with the truth as we perceive it. Nevertheless, the interpretation of this structure has suffered due to the controversy surrounding it. Many individuals have insisted that the interiors were added by Francis Corbin after 1756, as we have seen, while others have disagreed. Others have suggested that the building represents an alteration of an earlier

building in terms of both structure and form, and that the cupola itself, for example, is a later addition. The dwelling repeatedly has been compared with New England regional antecedents. Waterman remarked that the house represents "one of the most striking essays in the Jacobean style in America," and that "there is no more important example of Jacobean design south of Connecticut than the Cupola House, except Bacon's Castle in Surry County, Virginia."¹

Actually, the Cupola House is in many respects an architectural anomaly that cannot be explained by a simple comparison with dwellings standing outside the North Carolina Albemarle. Aligning the house with the "Jacobean" style is inadequate from more than one viewpoint. Frame houses with jettied or overshot second stories pre-dated the reign of even James I by at least two centuries. In America, they are represented by a number of seventeenth century examples with framed overhangs, and scores of others dating through the eighteenth century with hewn overhangs. The Cupola House has the deep jetty of early construction, but the extension was provided by very unconventional means, as we shall see. The only other details that the North Carolina building might seem to share with the New England buildings are the gable on the front elevation and the use of shaped brackets under the soffit of the jetty. New England houses with full framed jetties generally were constructed with casement windows of small size, and shaped drops that either were part of the upper corner posts or attached to them with mortise-and-tenon joints. They usually have a central chimney plan with a small entry.

In contrast, the Cupola House has guillotine sash, no drops under the soffit of the overhang, a plan based upon a central hall with exterior end chimneys, and it is graced with an imposing cupola of classical form. These, along with a number of other details, dissassociate the building from the mainstream of seventeenth and early eighteenth century building convention in the northeast. Clear architectural precedents for the Cupola House, in fact, are elusive, and for that reason the building must be understood within its own geographic context insofar as possible. In short, it would be a mistake to consider the house as a Carolina translation of a New England or even a British form. As Parsons has stated it, the authors have made the attempt to "lay aside all existing information and theses and examine the house as a newly-discovered" object. It was considered an

erroneous approach to enter the investigation in attempt to “prove” any existing preconception about the house. Nevertheless, important questions sought answers, such as whether or not the basic structure is an integral unit built at once, or, instead, conceals an earlier, simpler building. A particularly important puzzle was whether or not the decorative woodwork was added to the building, and, if so, by whom.

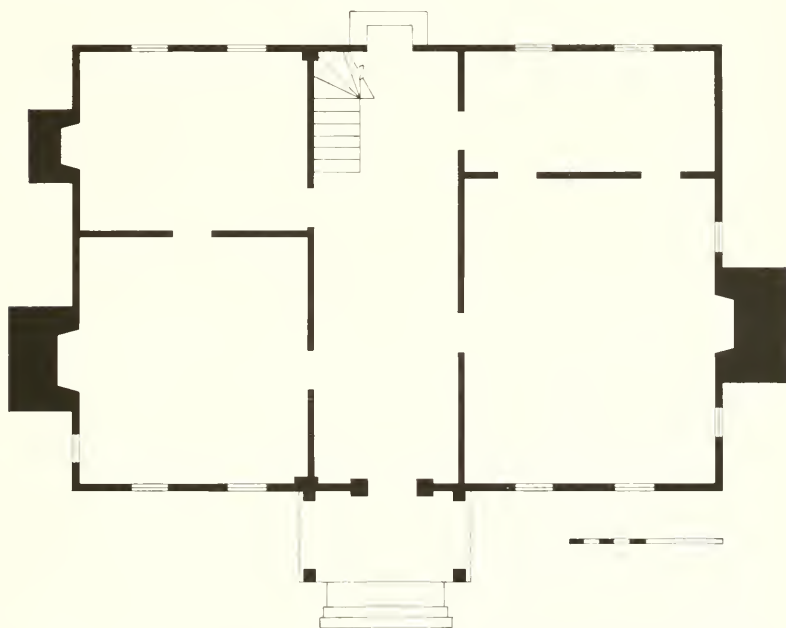


Figure 2. First floor plan. Courtesy of Mills Lane, illustrated on page 16 of *Mills Lane, Architecture of the Old South: North Carolina* (Savannah, Ga.: Beehive Press, 1985).

The Cupola House is a double-pile two-story-with-attic frame structure that is asymmetrical in both plan and every elevation, a pragmatic application that stands in contrast to the classical sense of ordered symmetry typical of Palladian dwellings of the lower Chesapeake. This asymmetry is one of the strongest statements of the basic vernacular nature of the building. Indeed, its double-pile plan is the only feature that might be said to be advanced for its time in North Carolina, since most frame buildings remained a single room deep until the beginning of the Neoclassical period. The double plan can be found in some of the early dwellings of eastern Virginia.

In the Cupola House, a commodious central passage is flanked on both west and east by two rooms of varying size (fig. 2). The principal room is the fully-paneled southeast hall, popularly known as the “dining room;” its finish includes a massive arched cupboard (fig. 54) in the north wall, suggesting that possible use. The presence of such a cupboard, however, does not serve to document the fixed use of a room, particularly in an early structure. Approximately sixteen feet wide by twenty feet deep, the hall adjoins a small unheated chamber on the northeast side that is only eight feet deep. On the west side of the passage is a smaller room, generally known now as the parlor, that, although not fully paneled, nevertheless is very well detailed. Approximately fifteen feet wide by sixteen feet deep, the parlor adjoins an 11 1/2-foot-deep chamber on the north. The chimney that serves this room as well as the interior finish of the space represents what appears to be an early nineteenth century alteration to the structure.



Figure 3. South and east elevations from the southeast.

The second-floor plan is much the same as the first floor, although the southern rooms naturally are deeper than the first-floor rooms due to the second-floor jetty. As on the first floor, there is a fully-paneled room on the southeast, and an unheated chamber on the northeast, a smaller heated bedchamber on the southwest, and a room on the northwest that has a later fireplace and Neoclassical finish (fig. 8). This later trim extends to the architraves of the door leading from the southwest room into the northwest chamber, indicating the probability that the door was cut through the wall at the time that the northwest room received its present finish.

Investigation of the Cupola House was undertaken by the authors over a two-day period in February, 1989, and was based upon both visual examination as well as X-ray radiography. Two of the authors, J. Melchor and Bivins, returned for further investigation and photography on independent trips in April and May of 1989 respectively. The analysis of the structure itself largely was drawn from what could be seen without the aid of any instrument, and revealed beyond the reasonable doubt of the authors that all three dimensions of the framing of the house were constructed at one time, from the foundation footprint to the peak of the cupola roof. An examination of the entire crawl-space by J. Melchor proved the foundation to be continuous under all interior partitions and exterior walls. The plan of both the first and second floors, then, follow the plan of the foundation, with two parallel interior foundation walls extending from front to rear (south to north) under the house, and corresponding with the passage partitions; other foundations provide load-bearing support for east-west framed partitions above, but they are not bonded to the north-south masonry. Of the visible or exterior portions of the foundation, however, only the first and second courses of the surface are original. The upper courses have been relaid in Flemish bond at an indeterminate date, whereas the original facing was English bond that matched the original chimney bases, a bond typical of the foundations of southern houses dating before the mid-eighteenth century. The interior foundations were constructed of sandal or place-bricks, that is, low-fired bricks, and show no evidence of ever having been exposed to the weather. No traces of earlier but now unused foundations or chimney bases were found under the house. This establishes the present double-pile, central-hall plan of the house as contiguous. A similar investigation of the framing of the building was undertaken, and

the frame indeed has proven to be very significant in regard to establishing the contiguity of all of the building's fabric as well as revealing surprising and unique technological applications. The impact of this evidence is tied with the architectural form and plan of the house, and therefore both should be considered together.



Figure 4. West elevation from the southwest. The north chimney on the west side of the house was a later addition, made by either Samuel Dickinson or Nathaniel Bond.

The asymmetry of the Cupola House is not a feature that has been examined to any extent in the past. It is by no means unusual for a building that is essentially Baroque in stance to provide a balanced front facade while yielding to pragmatically uneven fenestration at the sides and rear, but in this instance the building

violates even the order of its front. The porch, front gable or pediment, and cupola are oriented on the same vertical plane, but the front door and second-floor passage window are well off-center to the east (fig. 1). Like many features of the Cupola House, the asymmetry of both the front and rear elevations represents a vernacular and even naive solution to a problem. As Parsons



Figure 5. Rear or north elevation.

observes, this irregularity very well may represent the impact of the stair placement upon the location of the doors. The staircase has numerous stylistic parallels in British work. That the front and rear exterior doors of the house are off-center suggests that the size and location of the stair was determined before the door posts were joined to the frame. The width of one run of the stair

is approximately one-third the width of the stair passage, and therefore the two front-to-rear runs ascending to the second floor effectively make use of two-thirds of the rear wall of the passage (fig. 43). The remaining space permitted the installation of a generous rear door opening only by shifting the door to the east, thereby avoiding the turn of the stair. Since axial planning was of considerable importance in formal style, it was similarly necessary to shift the front door off center in order to place it upon the axis of the rear, thereby preserving the vista through two open doors. This further necessitated movement of the second-floor passage window on the front of the house, but the huge sixteen-over-twelve-light stair window at the rear was centered in the stair passage (fig. 5) in frank admission that the rear facade was considered to have less importance.

Although the staircase is a handsome piece of work, study of the balustrade reveals that it was not drawn out to scale and possible problems were not solved before work was begun. The stair seems to have been constructed a run at a time, with each new problem of ramp and easing resolved differently. The visual result is an imposing feature that seems to be crammed into an insufficient space; particularly clumsy is the location of the northeast chamber door partially above the second run of the stair. Similar problems of doors opening "onto thin air" are paralleled in more sophisticated dwellings, however. Two Virginia examples are the Tebbs house (now gone) in Dumfries and Menokin in Richmond County.² According to Waterman, the original plans for these high style houses included such doors in their original plans; they were not added after the houses were built. Such relatively unsuccessful solutions to use of space, then, certainly need not imply a later alteration to a structure.

The asymmetry of the exterior of the Cupola House is equally evident on both its east and west elevations. The impressive Flemish-bond chimneys are centered upon the rooms that they heat rather than being arranged on a common axis and in the center of the end walls. This again is a vernacular solution wherein the plan has regulated the arrangement of the exterior. That is, the irregular size and placement of the rooms has dictated chimney placement. A more advanced application might have been a more equal division of rooms and the use of corner fireplaces, but even the use of such massive exterior chimneys on an early two-story building in the lower Chesapeake is not common; most such chimneys are enclosed within the structure. A parallel in this

regard, however, is Tuckahoe in Goochland County, Virginia, the early all-frame portion of which presumably was constructed ca. 1720-30, judging from the fact that the stair carving in Rosewell in Gloucester County was executed by the same anonymous carver about 1725-26.³ As noted earlier, the north chimney on the west side of the Cupola House (fig. 4) was added at an undetermined date in the early nineteenth century, either by Samuel Dickinson, who died in 1802, or Nathaniel Bond (1781-1855), who married Dickinson's daughter Penelope in 1809.

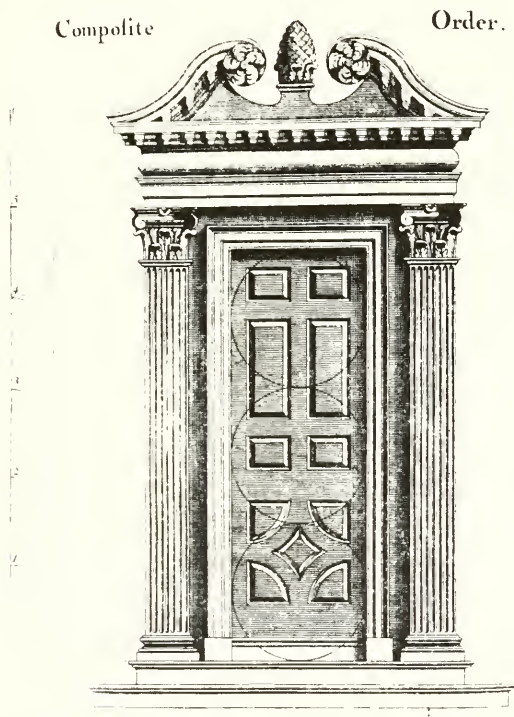


Figure 6. Plate XXXVI from the 1748 edition of William Salmon's *Palladio Londinensis*.

The exterior doors of the house are a prominent architectural feature that, due to the paneling plan, is often compared with later editions of Salmon's *Palladio Londinensis* (fig. 6), which was first issued in 1734; that particular edition contained no elevations of doors. There are other early buildings, including Tuckahoe, that have doors with astral or curved panels in the lower sections. The same paneling occurs on the wainscot-constructed

furniture of the Eastern Shore of Virginia.⁴ Such decorative work is not a derivation of classical architecture, but rather shows influence stemming from the strapwork designs of the Mannerist and Baroque periods. One of the most important applications of such designs was the plan of formal garden parterres, as Marilyn Melchor has pointed out. One seventeenth century English engraving (fig. 7) reveals that such designs were widely known long before Salmon published his first set of plates for doorways. A similar parterre plan was published in Sebastio Serlo's *Book of Architecture* in 1611, a London edition of the Italian work.

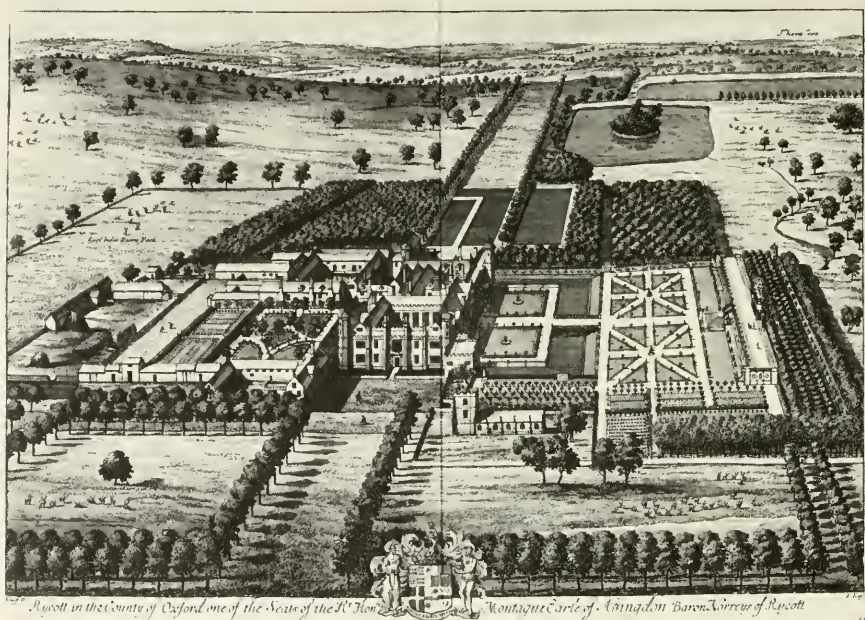


Figure 7. I. Kip, engraver, Rycott in the County of Oxford one of the Seats of the Rt. Honorable Montague Earle of Abingdon Baron Norreys of Rycott, London, 1690; an astral plan for a garden is shown at the left of the manor house. Photograph courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, accession 1967-355.

Aside from the very early and imposing form of the building's overhang, the cupola that has given the house its name certainly may be considered the most significant architectural feature of the building. It is, in fact, the most classical element of the dwelling's exterior. There is every evidence that the smooth rustication of the siding above the base is original. The ceiling joists project on the exterior, and are finished off underneath with

carved acanthus leaves much in the fashion of modillions.

In the New England genre of jettied two-story dwellings, such a cupola would seem an anachronism, therefore suggesting to some that it may have been a later alteration of the building. However, public buildings in the South and elsewhere made extensive use of "lanterns." Mann Page had incorporated a pair of them into the roof structure of his residence, Rosewell, and first-quarter eighteenth century buildings in Williamsburg such as the Governor's Palace certainly could have provided the stimulus for the residential use of a cupola in the Albemarle. There are other American precedents for residential cupolas in the early eighteenth century, even though evidently none survive. For example, in 1728 Godfrey Malbone built a large two-and-one-half-story gambrel on Thames Street in Newport, Rhode Island. A prominent cupola and what appears to be a balustraded gallery on this house appears in a 1740 sketch of the city. These features parallel the 1739 Colony House in Newport, an important Baroque building attributed to Richard Munday. In England, a 1693 three-story house with jettied upper stories in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, has a stylish cupola set at the juncture of the main block of the house and a rear ell. The arched heads of the windows in this example, combined with pilasters at the corners of the octagon and a full entablature above, show all of the detail that might be expected of the most formal public buildings.⁵ In every instance, including its use in Edenton, cupolas probably were intended more as an impressive and formal architectural statement than as a structure intended merely for practical use such as keeping watch for sails far out on the sound or sea.

The lantern of the Cupola House is integrated into the roof framing itself, which close examination has proven to represent original construction. Four massive trusses with their principal rafters, girts or tie beams, collars and braces bridge the upper portion of the house frame (fig. 8). The tie beams in turn are joined together by a plate that may be notched under the tie beams; the exact joinery could not be determined visually, nor is it known whether the plates are continuous beams as normal. The tie beams and plates are supported by full-height corner posts; story posts are set at the corners of the central passages. Between the story posts and the corner posts are posts that are but a single story in height due to the overhang; these evidently are positioned between the first and second-story windows, at least on the south or front of the building. The principal rafters of the trusses are

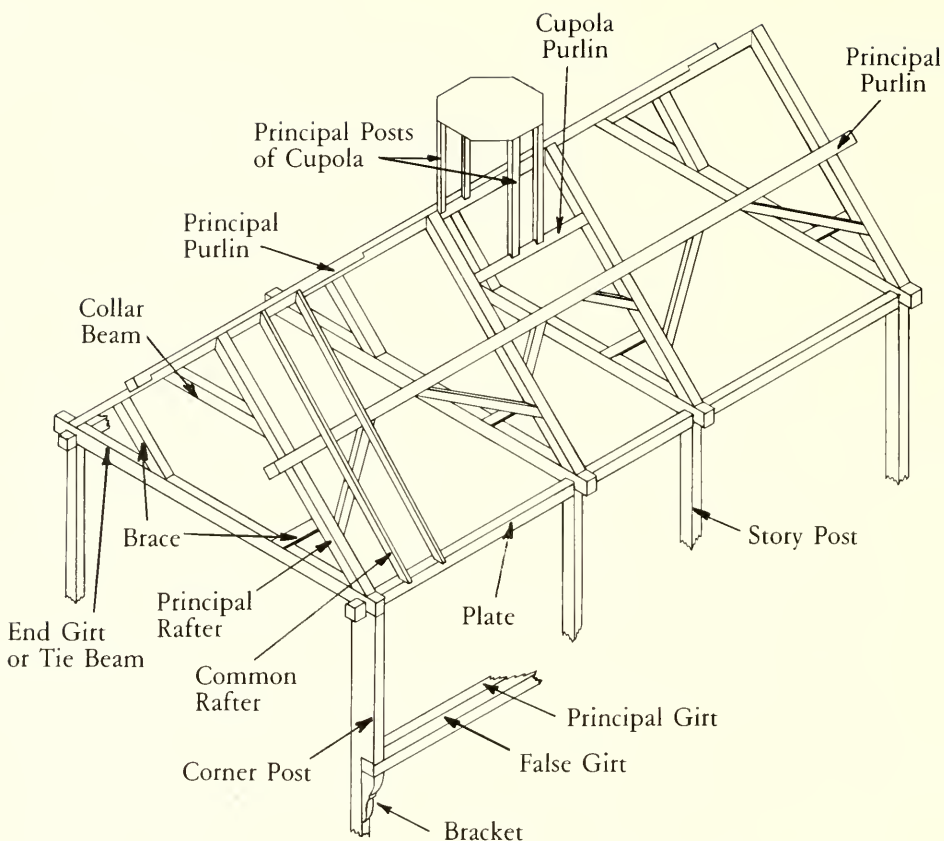


Figure 8. Partial framing schematic by Richard Parsons; finished art by Ron Rice.

connected by two heavy full-length medial purlins that appear to be one piece, although it is possible that some form of scarf joint is concealed over one of the principal rafters. The purlins are notched into the principal rafters, and are further strengthened by diagonal bracing between the trusses and the purlins. The principal rafters also are fitted with collar beams, in all demonstrating in both weight of framing and the degree of bracing a tradition of “over-building” that is often characteristic of frames constructed in the seventeenth century and earlier. Such overbuilding, however, is a feature that must be used with caution in establishing a reliable date for any structure, and in the Cupola House may simply indicate nothing more than naivete on the part of the joiner. Other details of the joinery tend to verify this. Another feature of the roof framing that cannot be used to provide specific

dating are the surface finishes of purlins, principal and common rafters, collar beams, and bracing; all of this material shows the kerfs of pitsawing. When a water-powered reciprocal saw was available, it often was neither good economics or even workmanlike to cut such timbers to dimension by hand. Pitsawn material virtually disappears from North Carolina Albemarle furniture by the early 1730s, but it appears evident that pitsawn material may be found much later in tidewater houses. This may simply represent the employment of inexpensive slave labor.

Situated between the central pair of principal rafters and above the principal purlins are a secondary pair of short, braced purlins cut to the same sectional dimensions as the principal purlins. This short pair of beams serves to support the four principal posts that establish the front and rear faces of the cupola; the remaining four posts are tied to the center pair of principal rafters. These short purlins, and the framing above them, is consistent with the finish and joinery of all of the roof framing. Although the entire roof system is without question soundly constructed, very naive solutions in the completion of the frame nevertheless are amply evident. The principal rafters are placed over the end and story posts of the frame, for example, which is a proper method of arranging load-bearing elements. The tie-beams upon which the principal rafters rest, however, project beyond the posts and plate of the frame. On the front of the house the principal rafters, in fact, are planted in from the ends of the tie beams by exactly the amount of the second-floor overhang. Further, the principal purlins are not flush with the top surfaces of the principal rafters, but instead project above them, thereby causing the common rafters to be thrown out to the axis of the projecting portion of the tie-beams. In order to accommodate this unusual structure, a false "plate" composed of both heavy boards and individual blocks was joined to the upper surface of the projections of the front tie beams in order to provide a seat for the common rafter butts. This shimming was not necessary on the north side. This also necessitated allowing the ends of the plates to project at each end of the building so that a common rafter could be placed out-board of the principal rafters at each gable. In other words, the common rafters do not have the same pitch as the principal rafters due to the fact that the purlins are not flush with or below the top surfaces of the principal rafters. The roof lathing, then, is nailed to the common rafters and does not engage the principal rafters. This strange construction is not known by the authors to

have other parallels, and indicates a probable ignorance of several aspects of conventional roof framing by the joiner. Certainly contiguous with the roof structure is the cupola framing, which, even though it reveals a better solution in construction, could not have been installed without completely dismantling the upper works of the house. There is no evidence of secondary alteration anywhere in the knockhead closets of the attic with the exception of repairs to the front gable.



Figure 9. Brackets and jettied second floor from the southeast.

Like the jettied second floor of the Cupola House, the framed gable on the south elevation suggests a much earlier architectural tradition. By the early eighteenth century, the fully-developed classical pediment typical of the Palladian style was the norm in the Chesapeake South. Front gables abound on seventeenth century New England structures, of course, and in most instances occur in pairs rather than as a single gable. One exception to this is evidence found in a late seventeenth century house at 21 Linnaean Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the dwelling was

enlarged in the early eighteenth century, and the facade gable removed.⁶

The front gable of the Cupola House retains its original ridge beam which is joined to the principal purlin on the south face of the roof, but there is extensive nineteenth and twentieth century repair to the structure. The truss forming the pitch of the gable is original, although scabbed out with modern material due to insect damage. The rafters are replaced except for two documentary fragments that have been saved. The framing of the exterior face is largely undisturbed, with all of the framed and sheathed surround for the oculus intact. The oculus itself is a modern replacement, very likely at least the third unit placed in the opening. The ca. 1918 view (fig. 22) shows a similar single-light unit, but it is more likely that the original was divided into quadrants in a mullioned frame. Nail hole evidence indicates that all of the oculi that occupied the gable at various periods were simply held in place with nails driven into the surround at an angle. Like other architectural elements that separate the Cupola House from conventional American seventeenth century structures, the oculus is not a detail normally associated with gables, but rather is a common feature of fully-developed pediments.

On the exterior of the front gable, the rakeboards, crown, and finish at the boxed cornice of the roof eaves are replacements of indeterminate date. Among the replacements that appear to have taken place during the nineteenth century is the finial with the initials "FC" and "17/58" applied to it. This feature, which long has served as an apparent document of Francis Corbin's residence in the house, will be discussed later in conjunction with other exterior decorative details. Like all of the attic except for the storage areas behind the knee walls, the interior of the gable was treated as a finished space, with its flooring contiguous with the adjacent attic passage. The interior of the gable was fully plastered down to a simple base that was run with a flush bead, the same base used in the two attic chambers and passage.

On more conventional eighteenth century buildings, tie beams and end girts that project over the front and rear plates provide eave overhangs as well as serve as nailers for a box cornice. In normal parlance, both principal and common rafters rest upon these projections, but as we have seen, only the common rafters do so on the Cupola House. This, of course, is not apparent from the exterior, so a normal boxed cornice may be observed. Also projecting beyond the frame are the ends of the plates, although

those on the west side of the building have been removed, probably due to weathering. This is an old-fashioned convention that permitted a footing for the support of outboard common rafters that formed extended eaves on each gable. The precedents for this are quite ancient, for even the seventeenth century frame houses of New England tend to have gable eaves that are virtually flush with the siding, the roofing projecting very little over the rakes much in the manner that was common later. There are exceptions, such as the 1637 Fairbanks House in Dedham, Massachusetts. Ever deeper gable eaves are evident on British buildings of earlier date. One such example illustrated by Abbott Cummings in his exceptional book *Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay*, a circa 1600 farmhouse in Banham, Norfolk, has eave projections that surely must approach a foot in depth.⁷ The reason for such great depth of eaving was the protection of exposed stucco between the half-timbered frames of earlier buildings, but such projections were hardly necessary on a weather-boarded dwelling. The Norfolk house illustrated in Cummings also reveals the ends of purlins that extend the full depth of the eave, providing further support for the outboard common rafter and the rake boards that constitute the finish for the outside edges of the eaves. The exceptional depth of the Cupola House eaves is an interesting comparison with such British prototypes, for in this, as well as the exposed and carved plate ends and a similar exposure and decoration of the purlins, we find details that seem to be related to British construction of the late sixteenth century and much earlier. Nevertheless, the presence of these details is not proof that the builder had come from an isolated British shire where such post-medieval details were retained until much later, especially in view of the strange solutions made elsewhere in the framing. The employment of finials on the roof ridge at the outside edge of the eaves also would appear to be a pre-seventeenth century device. Presumably these were mortised into the ridge beam, but it seems very unlikely that the present finials on the house could have survived the ravages of two-and-a-half centuries of weather. Nevertheless, they also appear on the 1918 view of the house.

The growing puzzle of an assembled group of architectural details and construction methodology that appears to defy direct comparison with other models is considerably heightened by an examination of the second-floor jetty of the house. Next to the cupola, the overhang is the building's most prominent feature.

Though no other examples of jettied buildings are known to survive in the South, the building practice must have been known. This is suggested in a surprisingly late eastern North Carolina court document of 1725 entitled "The Justices of Currituck v. Peyton." In the suit, the justices of the Currituck precinct court, among whom was Joseph Sanderson, Richard Sanderson's brother, took action against the joiner, Robert Peyton, who in April 1723 "did agree . . . to build for the said precinct a Courthouse of thirty feet in length eighteen feet in width with a fashionable overjet framed Worke Standing on Cedar Blocks . . . with sash windows. . . ." ⁸ We might well wonder if Richard Sanderson indeed was familiar with "overjet framed Worke" in his native Currituck, where such things evidently were still considered "fashionable." However, that possibility must be considered entirely conjectural, particularly in view of the fact that Peyton had not constructed the courthouse by 1725, when it was demanded that his bond of £140 be forfeited.

Noted earlier is the fact that jettied New England houses were constructed by two methods. The earlier form had actually begun to disappear by the early seventeenth century in Britain, and saw a surprising rebirth in New England after mid-century. ⁹ In this application, the first floor corner posts rise only to the end girt or horizontal beam situated at the second-floor level. The end girts project over the first-floor posts, and the second-floor posts are then mortised-and-tenoned to the projections of the girts, thereby forming the overhang (fig. 10). This construction persisted to the first decade of the eighteenth century in New England, but rapidly gave way to the later form of attenuated jetty which was not achieved by a framed overhang. Instead of allowing the end girts to project, the front girt was simply hewn into an L-shaped section, thereby providing a shallow jetty four to six inches deep, much in contrast with the ten to twelve inches or more of soffit obtainable in a framed jetty. The hewn overhang persisted through the eighteenth century in some areas of New England, representing something of a vestigial remains of an earlier and more robust style.

On the exterior, the deep jetty of the Cupola House suggests a framed overhang. The actual construction, however, was found to have nothing to do with known British or New England framing traditions. Rather than having two tiers of corner and story posts, the Cupola House has single, one-piece posts that rise from the sills to the plates, with the exception of the paired single-story

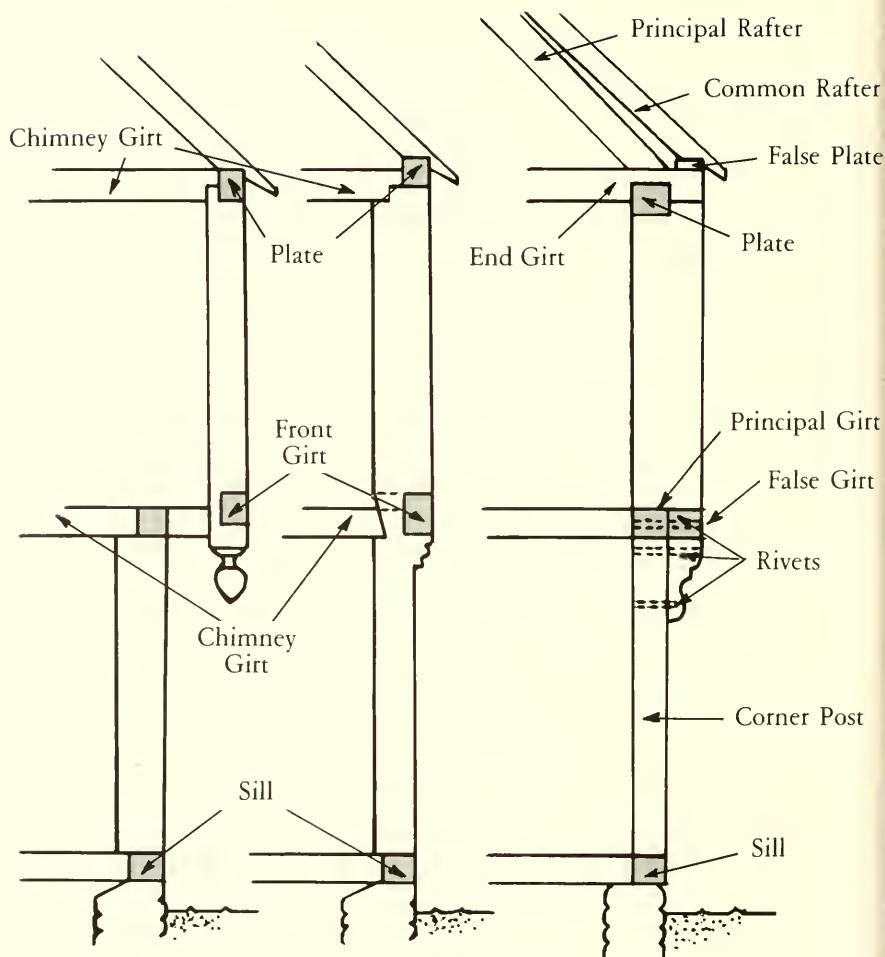


Figure 10. Elevations of framing plans for jettied second stories. Left to right: New England, 17th century; New England, 18th century; the Cupola House. Technical art by Ron Rice, with the details of the Cupola House false girt and brackets provided by James Melchor.

posts that are really no more than heavy studs. From the second-floor level to the plates, the posts are twice their first-floor depth (figs. 8, 14). This dimensional change in the posts allows the upper level of the posts to project well over the lower halves. The posts are apparently joined conventionally with a series of girts mortised-and-tenoned to the posts, although this joinery could not be verified visually. In front of these principal or joined girts is a

false girt (fig. 13) running the length of the house that is joined to the principal girts with large iron rivets approximately 1 1/4" in diameter. On the outside face of the false girts, the rivets are set into counterbores (fig. 12). They are not situated over the posts; from the apparent spacing, at least five and as many as seven of these rivets attach the false girt to the house frame. This construction was discovered only by virtue of the fact that rotted siding above the jetty had been removed from the house during the course of winter repairs, making two of the rivets visible, one of them well below the surface due to rot of the false girt.



Figure 11. Jettied second floor construction revealed by removed weatherboarding, southeast corner.

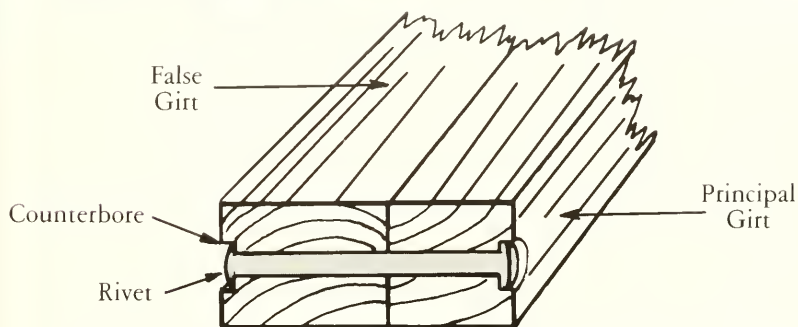


Figure 12. Section through the false and principal girts. Technical art by Ron Rice, based upon a representation by James Melchor.



Figure 13. Exposed false girt, east side of south elevation; the hole in the girt above the right side of the window is the counterbore for a rivet.

Further supporting the false girt and its attendant framing above are four heavy brackets under the soffit of the jetty (figs. 9, 11). Like the false girt, the brackets proved to be attached to the frame with heavy rivets (fig. 15); the plugs covering the rivet heads are visible on the exterior. These rivets pierce the corner posts and the one-story posts between the windows. The nature of supports for the girt, if any, on each side of the door is unknown since that area is hidden by the rear columns and roof of the porch. On a jettied building, a porch appears to be a visual anomaly. The existing feature has a crown mold in front identical to later crown molds under the gable eaves of the roof, but other molding details appear to match similar treatment inside the house. The porch appears to date from the eighteenth century, but it deserves further study.

The dummied girt and its attendant brackets, then, appear to be an ad hoc solution to providing a jettied second floor. The brackets themselves are classical in form, resembling inverted, giant bed molds consisting of an ovolo, fillet, and cyma. Brackets may be found at the gables of New England dwellings, but they are ornamental rather than load-bearing; on the 1683 Capen house in Topsfield, Massachusetts, the brackets are tenoned into the plates. They were sawn to the profile of a bolection molding; similar brackets ornamented the gables of the 1680 Old Feather Store (now gone) in Boston as well as the 1685-90 Andrews house in Hingham, Massachusetts.¹⁰ The 1650-60 Cowles house and the Gleason house of the same date, both in Farmington, Connecticut, have large ornamental brackets under the soffit of the jetties.



Figure 14. Radiograph 23 of the corner post, southwest corner, with the source located in the second-floor southwest chamber and angled slightly down. The film for this radiograph was placed outside the house, its lower 17" side horizontally aligned with the lower edge of the bottom weatherboard of the second floor. Superimposed on the film are wrought nails, the horizontal grain and shadow of the baseboard at the bottom, the floor (lower right), the horizontal shadows of plaster lath (containing the small wrought nail right of center top), the vertical grain of the corner post, the false girt (the rectangular shadow in the lower center of the film), and the horizontal grain and shadow of weatherboards (the large wrought nail at upper left is a siding nail). An examination of the radiograph resulted in the conclusion that the first floor (a) corner post is shouldered over the false girt and presumably continues in this one-piece double depth the full height of the second floor (b). The false girt is approximately 9" deep, matching the depth of the bracket tops (see fig. 15), and is about $6 \frac{3}{4}$ " in height.

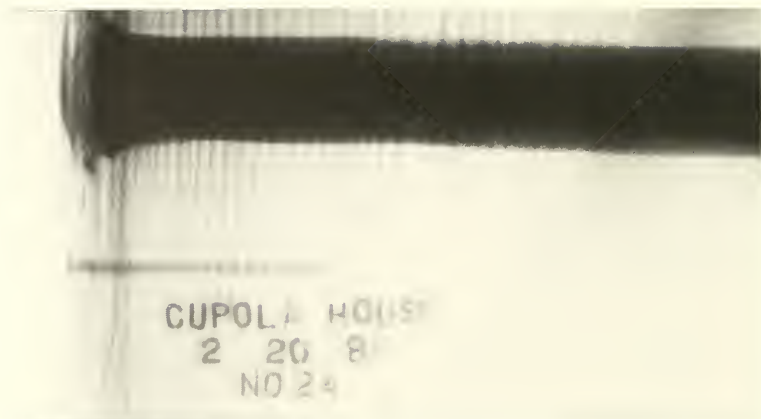


Figure 15. Radiograph 24 of the top rivet of the bracket located between the windows of the first floor southeast room. The source of the radiograph was the east side of the bracket; the film was placed on the west side. The iron rivet is approximately 1 1/4" in diameter; the upset or peened head is fitted into a counterbore that is plugged on the exterior. The console is approximately 9" deep at the top. A modern wire nail below the rivet represents a repair.

In both instances, the brackets were placed on each side of the door and at the corner posts, and both are cut with the profile of two astragals with an extra pair of fillets; the upper astragal is roughly twice the size of the lower.¹¹ There is nothing to suggest that they are load-bearing.

The concept of riveted framing members is foreign to conventional building practice. Aside from the usual fasteners, architectural hardware, and an occasional forged strap used to prevent the separation of highly stressed frames,¹² house joiners normally did not employ iron for any frame construction. The jetty of the Cupola House, in fact, appears to be significantly related to ship construction. As Parsons has noted, if the Cupola House were destroyed by a hurricane, leaving the bottom of the overhang beached in Pembroke Creek, we probably would mistake it for the keel of a ship. Such comparisons can hardly be considered glib when the construction is compared with the rotted keel and rudder post (fig. 16) of a sloop or schooner that may be seen in the public park on Union Point in New Bern. In a ship, the stem, keel, stern, frames, knees, and other hull members required either massive rivets or large trunnels (wooden pins) for joinery, since, like the Cupola House girt, many were laminated structures that could not be held together by common joinery. In that sense, even the brackets of the Cupola House jetty are not unlike ship's

knees. We must not conclude from this that the artisan who built the Cupola House frame was without question trained as a shipwright, but the allusion is compelling, especially in view of other aspects of the house frame that are either naive or unconventional. In port towns like Edenton, most woodworkers enjoyed a significant amount of maritime employment. Cabinetmakers, for example, commonly fashioned blocks of all sizes, as well as repinning and resheaving old ones, and they also made ship's pumps and fitted out cabin interiors. It would not have been unusual for a house carpenter to fashion either ship's knees or the corner posts of a dwelling. Conversely, it is equally possible that a ship carpenter might have tried his hand at a house frame. Since both house joinery and shipbuilding were largely specialized trades, an artisan trained in one field was likely to reveal a certain amount of ignorance when called upon to execute a job in the allied field.

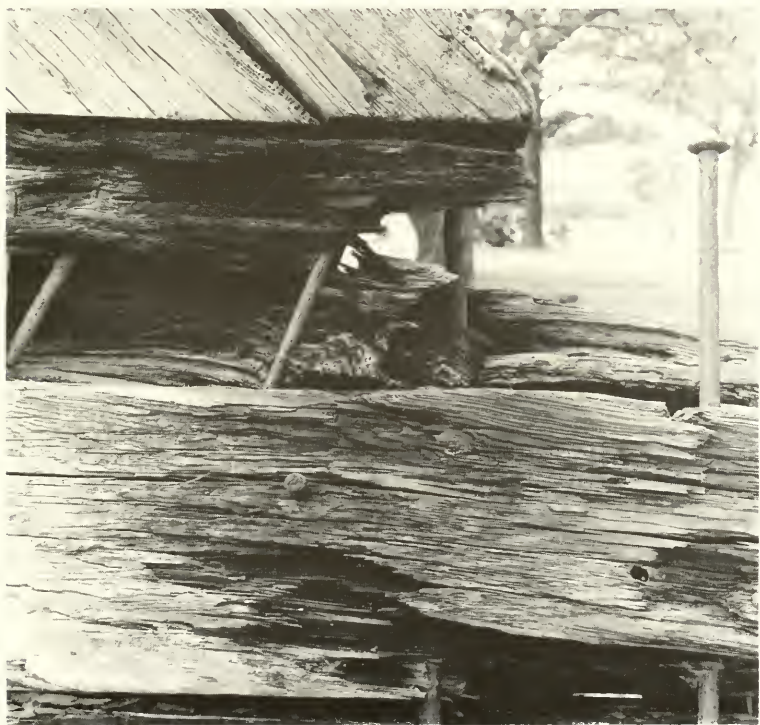


Figure 16. Rivets joining the keel laminates from a sloop or schooner, probably nineteenth century, Union Point, New Bern, N.C. MRF S- 14,502.

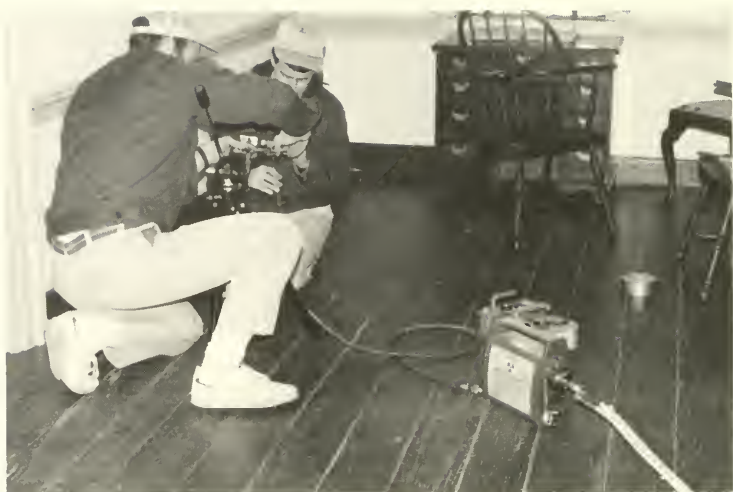


Figure 17. Radiographers preparing equipment for an exposure through the west or passage wall of the second floor southeast chamber.

The X-ray radiography used to examine the construction of the house actually had been intended for study of the interior woodwork. The visual discovery of the riveted construction simply made the presence of the unit a bonus to the study. The equipment and technicians were supplied by ATEC Associates, Inc., an Indianapolis-based firm with an office in Norfolk. The equipment consisted of an Amersham 660 gamma ray emitter charged with 48 curies of radioactive Iridium 192 as a source; this device was used to expose high speed DuPont NDT 75 film. Exposure times were 45 seconds for interior walls, 60 seconds for exterior walls, and 75 seconds for the radiograph of the exterior bracket. The radiographers were Brett Clarke and Mike Johnson; 24 exposures were made, all but two on 14" X 17" sheet film. A report detailing the position of each exposure was provided by ATEC, and J. Melchor undertook a painstaking analysis of each film, providing a written report of each.

The X-ray radiographic examination of old buildings is not a new science, but it is infrequently employed due to the expense. A day's work at the Cupola House, for example, cost MESDA \$1,230. Such analysis must be considered inexpensive, however, when examination by any other means would be destructive. X-ray therefore is a powerful ally of the preservationist. Restoration architect David McLaren Hart of Massachusetts has used

radiography for similar applications for some time, and provides a succinct description of how it works:

Very simply, x-rays are a form of high energy electromagnetic radiation. . . . When a beam of x-rays is transmitted through any heterogeneous object, it is differentially absorbed, depending upon the thickness, density, and chemical composition of the object. The less dense portion of an object, for instance, allows a greater proportion of the radiation to pass through than the more dense. The image registered by the emergent rays on a film that is placed adjacent to the object constitutes a shadowgraph, or radiograph, of the object's interior. X-rays are able to penetrate most materials used in building construction, but with varying facility. Wood and conventional plaster are penetrated easily: masonry, earth, and some metals, on the other hand, are highly absorbent of x-rays. . . .¹³

The post-medieval appearance of certain aspects of the Cupola House framing are visibly evident on the interior of the dwelling. Most particularly, the heavy corner and story posts of the house are exposed wherever the walls of a room were plastered, including the first floor passage and southwest room or parlor and the second floor passage (fig. 18) and southwest bedchamber. When the original first-floor rooms of the Cupola House were installed in the Brooklyn Museum, the installations omitted the appearance of exposed posts, allowing cornices and chair-rails to mitre in the corners in normal fashion rather than either abutting the posts as in the passages or fitting around them, as they originally were treated in the parlor (fig. 56).¹⁴

During the eighteenth century, it was common practice to hew out the interior portions of large square or rectangular posts, leaving them in an "L" shaped section, in order to avoid their intrusion into a room. The tedious hewing allowed either plaster lath or paneling to be fitted into the space provided. Earlier, however, framing was not only left full-section and allowed to show in room corners, but was often run with decorative moldings or chamfers. The builder of the Cupola House chose a workmanlike solution to the problem of finishing and decorating the edge of the posts simply by casing them off on the inside with boards run with a robust flush-bead, certainly an easier task



Figure 18. Exposed story post, southwest corner of the second-floor passage.

than planing posts either before or after they were assembled. Some forty miles south of Edenton, in the tiny port of Bath on the Pamlico River, a French-born merchant, Michael Coutanche, built a two-story frame house ca. 1739-44 that is still standing, and known as the Palmer-Marsh house (fig. 19). This dwelling also has posts that are exposed on the interior (fig. 20), but in this instance the exposed surfaces of the posts are finish-planed and then run with a flush bead. Except for its massive English-bond double chimney that incorporates lighted closets or cupboards, the Palmer-Marsh house is a far more conventional structure than the Cupola House, and its exposed framing represents



Figure 19. Palmer-Marsh House, 1739-44, Bath, N. C. MRF S-14,503.



Figure 20. First floor southeast room, Palmer-Marsh House; an exposed corner post is located at the right of the window. MRF S-14,503.

a vernacular solution to a framing problem rather than one retardataire application among many that is characteristic of the Edenton structure. There are other examples of similar exposed framing elsewhere in the Carolina Coastal Plain. One relatively late example is 6 Church Street in Wilmington, a large, nicely-detailed coastal cottage with a full basement, and probably constructed about 1790 even though it has an earlier appearance in elevation and architectural detail. The posts of 6 Church Street, like the Cupola House, are sheathed and molded.

The most significant clue regarding the entire continuity of the Cupola House it lies in the decorative carving of both exterior and interior elements, for they are inextricably tied in regard to style and execution. Of the decorative exterior elements, perhaps the most problematical has been the finial of the front gable (fig. 23). Noted earlier was the fact that this finial, along with its flanking rakes, was replaced at some indeterminate date before 1918. The face of the finial bears the initials "FC" and the date "1758," the year in which Corbin is thought to have completed whatever renovation to the house he may have performed. The initials themselves, as Waterman noted, "are applied and not carved upon the finial."¹⁵ Due to the absence of any visible weathering of the initials, in fact, it is not unreasonable to assume that they are not wood at all, but another material such as sheet lead, and simply tacked in place. The rather crude execution of both letters and figures offers no concrete stylistic evidence of age, so we do not know whether they graced an earlier finial or not. Fortunately, however, the abiding historical interest that the Bond family felt for the house brought about the preservation of the house's original finial (figs. 24, 25), which long has lain in the attic. It seems doubtful that Corbin, had he replaced the finial himself, would have bothered to save a rotted and badly weathered original. In any event, the present unit attached to the house utilizes neither the style nor the joinery of the original, which is larger and far more elaborate than the present unit.

The original finial is pierced with a large vertical mortise that originally engaged a tenon on the end of the ridge beam of the gable. Although it has not been verified, the present finial does not appear to be attached with such a joint. The heavy weathering pattern of the original, in combination with the damp rot that appears to have occurred under something applied on the surface, suggests that the original rake boards of the gable very likely passed over the front face of the finial, joining in a mitre



Figure 21. Radiograph 1 of the story post, southwest corner of the first-floor passage. The film was placed in the passage and the source in the southwest room or parlor. The bottom of the radiograph is at chair rail level. The radiograph shows a furring strip (a) nailed to the post with wrought nails about 2" long (b). The lathing (c) is nailed to both sides of the furring strip with wrought nails (d), indicating that when the woodwork of the parlor and passage were removed by the Brooklyn Museum, the original plaster and lath was left largely undisturbed. The presence of wire nails (e) in this image indicate the new facings on the corner posts and a new chair rail, both installed during the 1960s restoration.



Figure 22. The south elevation from the southwest as it appeared circa 1918. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

in the center and thereby covering the mortise-and-tenon joint. Angled cuts in the face of the finial also suggest this, but the amount of weathering is too severe to provide concrete evidence. The upper portion of the finial was sawn to shape in a peaked spire that projected further above the ridge than the later unit. There is nothing left to prove or disprove that initials or a date of any sort were ever attached to this finial, but if indeed the rakes did cross the face, then it seems less likely that anything other than the rakes were applied to the surface unless it was in the upper part of the finial, which is substantially rotted. Whether or not the initials on the present finial, then, were ever applied to the original is not possible to determine. It is possible that the "FC/17/58" was indeed nailed to the original finial, and that the Bonds preserved the letters and affixed them to the later finial. It is equally possible, however, that the Bonds had the initials and date made and added to the new finial simply to commemorate the history of the house. This puzzle may never be solved.



Figure 23. Finial, marked "FC/ 17/ 58," front gable. This finial is a pre-1918 replacement of the original (see fig. 24).

More important to the examination at hand is the console-like carving of the lower part of the old finial. Since the scroll at the bottom is not integrated with the lower edge of the finial, it seems possible that the finial rested upon an exterior collar beam fitted across the soffit of the gable. Whatever the arrangement might have been, the carving itself is very significant. A close examination of the carver's style and technique reveal beyond any doubt that the same hand executed the other exterior carving still surviving on the building. The finial carving generally



Figure 24. Original front gable finial. The vertical mortise received a tenon cut on the end of the gable ridge beam.



Figure 25. Detail of the carving at the bottom of the original finial.

is well-drawn, but the flat, unmodeled quality of the leaves and simple, heavy-handed veiner shading is relatively naive. The shaping of the leaves, which in the typical carver's tradition was effected with vertical setting-in or straight-down cuts with gouges, shows the repeated application of only two radii of gouges. This degree of repetition of cuts with the same tools indicates that the carver's tool kit seems to have been a limited one.



Figure 26. Carved plate end, southeast corner, from the southeast.



Figure 27. Detail of the southeast plate end, from the northeast.

In addition to the early finial, other carved elements on the house include the surviving plate ends (figs. 26, 27) on the east side, the exposed ends of the purlins on both the east (figs. 29, 30) and west (fig. 31) sides, and the ends of the ceiling joists of the cupola (figs. 32, 33). Since the plates are covered, it was not possible to determine whether their exposed ends were cut from the solid beams or applied with a mortise-and-tenon joint. Similarly, the ceiling plaster of the cupola prevents an inspection of the ceiling joists. An examination of these modillion-like joist ends, however, reveals that several are not square with the external faces of the cupola (fig. 32), and one modillion on the north side is notched on top to accommodate a soffit board that may have warped before the modillion was installed. It is also possible that this evidence indicates warping of timbers, workmanship that was not equal to the installation of an elaborate converging joist system, as well as later repairs, so any evidence of whether the cupola joist ends are actually part of the joists themselves is inconclusive.



Figure 28. Southwest corner. The plates do not project on the west side, indicating that the projections had been damaged and possibly removed before the installation of the present crown mold under the gable eaves.

The pair of heavy principal purlins of the roof, however, is another matter. Investigation from both inside the knockhead attics of the garret as well as examination of the top of the southeast purlin with roofing and roof sheathing removed indicates that the exposed ends of three of the four purlins are integral with the beams themselves.¹⁶ Only the northeast purlin end



Figure 29. Exposed end of the southeast principal purlin, from the east.

apparently is an integral portion of the beam was the northeast unit. The southeast purlin is notched half its depth to engage the principal rafter at that point. On the west side of the house, the purlins were notched a full three-quarters of their depth for the same purpose. This deep notching resulted in a partial destruction of the purlin ends due to splitting along the end grain. The small amount of stock that retained the west purlin ends was not sufficient to prevent half of the southwest purlin end from splitting away (fig. 31), and a third of the northwest unit (fig. 31). As noted earlier, a double ogee-with-fillet crown molding was added later under all the eaves, abutting the shear faces of the broken purlins on the west; this same molding was used under the gable of the porch roof.

A substantial overburden of paint partially obliterates the carving under the purlin ends, but since they were protected from heavy weathering by the extended eaves, the essential nature of the shaping and modeling of the acanthus leafage is evident. This includes the limited number of gouges used for setting-in the profiles of the leaves, the flat modeling, and the simple, heavy veining that converges upon a thick, tapering central spine of

the leaves. All of these details are consistent not only with the original finial carving, but that of the plate ends and cupola ceiling joist tips as well. The work was all executed by the same carver. Particularly significant is the fact that the purlin ends with the one noted possible exception, and very likely the plate ends as well, would have been sawn to shape and carved before the timbers were set in place. Any other solution would have been



Figure 30. Detail of the southeast principal purlin.

unworkmanlike, for it would have taken a carver with grim determination and either elaborate scaffolding or the physical attributes of a simian to shape and carve the bottom surfaces of the large beams after they had been joined to the roof framing. The contiguity of the exterior carving with the beams that it ornaments, at least in the instance of the purlins, therefore provides us with



Figure 31. Exposed end of the southwest principal purlin, from the west garret window. The northern half of the purlin end is sheared off.

important evidence about the contiguity of the entire structure. The chain of carving and construction links the plan, frame, roof structure, cupola, and all of the interior finish, for the carver who executed the exterior decoration of the Cupola House also created all of the carving on both floors of the interior.

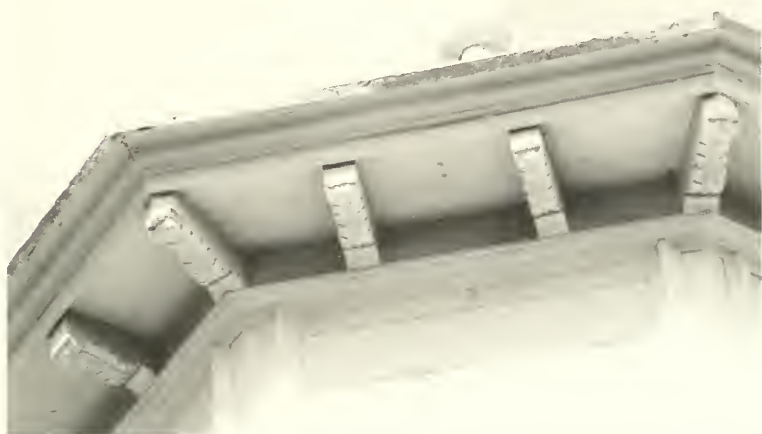


Figure 32. Carved ceiling joist ends under the soffit of the cupola roof. One of these ends is crooked, indicating poor installation, later warpage, or the possibility that the modillion-like joist ends are separate pieces.

The original carving remaining in the house today consists of the chimneypieces in the southeast and southwest second-floor chambers and the brackets or spandrels of the stair. As noted earlier, the balance of the first floor woodwork is an excellent replica based upon the original woodwork now installed in Brooklyn. The original carving on both floors of the house, like that on the exterior, is relatively elaborate but not necessarily well-detailed. The work, although it could not be classified as crude, certainly reveals the hand of a carver not trained in urban architectural carving. Instead, his style is antiquated, a vernacular extension of the English Baroque style of the late seventeenth century. A comparison with other American architectural carving of the first half of the eighteenth century has yielded no strong parallels. The style of the Cupola House work has something of the rather flat, stonecarver's-like quality of the large appliques in Drayton Hall, built in the late 1730s near Charleston, South Carolina. However, the design sources for the Drayton decora-



Figure 33. Detail of the carved acanthus on one of the cupola joist ends.

tion are known, and the carving, if not wholly urban quality, is more competently drawn and better-detailed than the Cupola House decoration. The latter has more of the quality of maritime carving, which often depended upon a polychrome finish to provide carved details with greater boldness. Such a comparison is hardly adequate, however, since there is very little American ships' carving like that ornamenting transoms, trailboards, and billet heads, that survives from even as early as the late eighteenth century.

The essentially Baroque nature of all the interior carving is nowhere more evident than that in the second floor rooms. All of the interior carving shows the use of the same tool sweeps and techniques used on the exterior, including the flat quality of modeling and simple, heavy veining converging on the central spines of the acanthus leaves. The result, especially on the elongated consoles of the two second-floor overmantels (figs. 35, 37), is very repetitive. None of the interior work is as deeply relieved as the exterior carving, showing the carver's understanding that decoration that was to be installed far above the viewer's level required greater boldness in order to be seen at all. Carving inside the rooms obviously did not carry the same visual requirement, and therefore needed less relief at its edges.

The second floor overmantel consoles are not only Baroque, but almost pre-Baroque or Mannerist in both form and execution. In classical architecture, consoles were intended to give the appearance of supporting architectural members above them, and therefore in this instance they are placed just below the overmantel pediments. In neither case, however, do these consoles have the appearance of anything other than applied ornament. Their profiles are too flat for their height so that they do not project sufficiently, and the severe, squared plinths below them are naive. In the southeast chamber the upper portions of the consoles are allowed to die under the lower crown mold of the pediment (fig. 35).

Each of the four original fireplaces in the house shows a later alteration. In their initial configuration, the fireboxes had considerable depth and width, especially on the first floor, where the fireboxes have been returned to their early form during the restoration work of the 1960s. Although dramatic in appearance, the great size of the original fireplaces certainly must have caused a considerable degree of inefficiency, with much of the warm air in the room rushing up the cavernous flues. By the late eigh-



Figure 34. Chimneypiece, second floor southeast chamber.



Figure 35. Detail of an overmantel console, second floor southeast chamber.



Figure 36. Chimneypiece, second floor southwest chamber.



Figure 37. Detail of an overmantel console, second floor southwest chamber.

teenth century, it was well known that smaller fireboxes of a different plan served far better for heating; theories for proper fireplace design were published in England by Count Rumford. Both of the second floor fireplaces were "Rumfordized" at an indeterminate date with shallow sloping backs, constricted throats and smoke shelves, sharply-splayed sides, and lowered arches. All of the original arches on both floors were segmental, and now are flat. These alterations required that the fireplace surrounds be reworked in order to better relate to the lowered arches. The moldings used for the mantel architraves on the second floor match those of the Neoclassical woodwork of the northwest chamber (fig. 38), indicating the probability that the fireboxes were altered at the time that the northwest chimney was added. However, the jambs of the first floor southeast room, or hall, were fitted with a marble facing (fig. 50) of a style that began appearing in the Southeast by the 1750s. This facing was smaller than the firebox, and concealed the segmental arch that is still in place. Just when this facing was added, then, is subject to question, but the alteration was earlier than that of the second-floor fireplaces.

The alteration of the second floor mantels is evident upon examination of the firebox surrounds. In the fully-paneled southeast chamber, the crossetted architrave of the mantel (fig. 34) has either been reduced in both height and width or simply replaced altogether. Evidence of that possibility lies in an apparently identical ovolo backband on the Neoclassical mantel (fig. 38) in the northwest chamber. Whatever the form of the original backband molding, it was spaced further from the firebox than the present ovolo. If it was a crossetted backband, then the crossettes extended to the fillets of the panel stiles on each side of the fireplace. This seems indicated by the short section of pieced-in chair rail just below the crossettes, yet the room bases are not similarly pieced, suggesting that they are replacements dating from the mantel alteration. The original segmental arch is preserved behind the present mantel fascia approximately eight inches above the present splayed arch, indicating that the position of the upper backband molding was lowered at least $5\frac{1}{2}$ ".

The southwest chamber shows similar alteration to the mantel woodwork (fig. 36). In this instance, the entire architrave surrounding the firebox clearly is a Neoclassical replacement, since it has the same molding configuration of the door casings of the northwest chamber. The lower flat arch of the fireplace



Figure 38. Mantel, second floor northwest chamber. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

necessitated the wide fascia under the upper architrave. Evidence of the original fireplace arch is missing in this room, but it presumably was an exposed segmental arch like the others. Chair-rail piecing also has taken place in this room, indicating the possibility that the mantel shelf and the torus below it have been reduced in width, which is a possibility since the shelf in the southeast chamber is the same width as the pediment above. Without the complete removal of paint and even some of the overmantel elements, it is difficult to determine just how the



Figure 39. Radiograph 4 of the baseboard of the west or passage wall of the second floor southeast chamber; the source was in the passage, the film in the chamber. The exposure was made at a position 29 inches south of the passage door frame. Plaster debris (a) up to 6 3/4" deep is seen at the bottom; the short wrought nails with heads attach the plaster lath (b); slimmer, apparently headless sprigs driven into the stud (c) attach the chamber paneling. A mortise and tenon joint (d), with its pin, just above inch 35, is part of the framing of the chamber paneling. Three empty nail holes in this four-inch stud indicate from their regular spacing that the chamber probably originally was sheathed and then paneled.



Figure 40. Radiograph 19 of a stud in the west wall of the second floor southeast chamber, 53" south of the passage door. The source was in the passage, and the film in the chamber. This radiograph is part of a vertical series of exposures of this stud, beginning at 14" above the floor and continuing to the ceiling. This particular exposure represents inches 35, 42, and 47 above the floor. The film reveals paneling and lath secured to the stud with wrought nails (a); empty nail holes at 2 5/8", 6 3/8", 9 7/8", 11 3/4", and 15 5/8" (two (b) of these are clearly visible above and below inch 41); repairs (c) to a cracked panel made with wire nails are visible.

southwest chimneypiece was altered. There is nothing to suggest that its original appearance, other than a different mantel architrave and perhaps a wider shelf and torus, was markedly different than what we see now.

The alteration of the fireboxes and surrounding woodwork on the second floor appears to have taken place early in the nineteenth century. Evidence of a much earlier alteration to the entire finish of the southeast chamber, however, was revealed both by visual inspection and X-ray. During the course of examining the upper framing of the house where rotted siding had been removed, it was found that the wall studs of the second floor southeast chamber have been spliced with lapped scarf joints approximately ten inches in length. X-ray analysis shows that these scarfs are fastened with wooden pins (fig. 41). The lower part of the studs as well as the spliced section are both pit-sawn. The paneling of this room is not attached directly to the studs and braces, but rather to furring strips nailed across the studs with wrought nails, as the X-rays reveal (fig. 40). Since there is a space between the studs and the back of the paneling, the inside faces of the studs could be studied. It was found that these faces were filled with broken nails and empty nail holes, both of which could be viewed with a mirror.

It is difficult to understand the reason for the pieced-out studs. Their joinery and surface finish appear to indicate that this alteration took place during the construction of the house, possibly due to an error on the part of the joiner. They actually were cut approximately four inches too short. The studs are mortised into the false girt (fig. 13), but it would have seemed simpler to make and fit new studs rather than lengthening them. However, other anomalies in the framing also strongly suggest both ignorance and errors, so the possible stud errors and consequent alterations are in keeping with some of the strange framing practices seen elsewhere, particularly in the roof. Two studs were observed to have numbering that does not correspond with any known frame numbering, suggesting that during the course of splicing them out, the studs were moved about or were even spliced with salvaged material. X-ray analysis showed no such anomalies with the studding of the southwest chamber.

The nail holes inside the southeast chamber studs extend the full height of the studs, indicating that something was attached to them, including the scarfed upper portions. This was verified by a series of X-rays extending the height of one stud in the west



Figure 41. Radiograph 10 of the stud east of the west window in the south or exterior wall of the second floor southeast chamber. The source was in the chamber; the film was located on the exterior at the base of the stud. Paneling details are clear in this example; the furring strip is indicated only by the larger wrought nail (a) near the top which attaches it to the stud; the smaller slit or T-head finish nail (b) at the top attaches the paneling to the furring strip. The scarf joint is evident here only by the presence of a trunnel or wooden pin (c) at right center of the radiograph. Horizontal cracks (d) in the paneling also can be seen. Empty holes (e) and a broken nail (f) are also apparent.

or passage wall of the room (fig. 40). The vertical spacing of the nail holes suggests the former presence of horizontal sheathing. The average spacing between the holes on the one stud is approximately 4 1/2'', but spacing varied between a minimum of two and a maximum of nine inches. It is clear that these nail holes had nothing to do with plaster lath such as those applied to the studs of the southwest chamber (fig. 42), which retains its original wall finish. A lath requires a relatively uniform, close spacing of 2-2 1/2''. Further, plaster lines remain on studs even after lath and plaster is removed, and there is no evidence of this in the southeast chamber.

Both visual inspection and X-ray indicate that most of the nail holes in the studs are empty. This indicates the probability that the nails were pulled out of the studs soon after they were driven in, for the tannic acid in ring-porous wood (the studs appear to be oak or ash, but no microanalysis was made) cause nails to rust fast very quickly. Wrought-iron nails break off easily. This appears to indicate that the owner very likely changed his mind regarding the finish of the room during the course of construction of the house. The change from what may have been sheathing to the present paneling may well have taken place even before the second-floor passage walls were plastered, since there is a good deal of plaster debris behind the base of the passage partition (fig. 39), most of which probably represents excess material troweled through the lath beyond what was needed for a good key. Had the passage been plastered before the installation of paneling in the southeast chamber, the plaster debris would have had to be removed since it would have fallen into the room in a talus, preventing the installation of bases without prior removal of the debris.

It appears, then, that the wall finish of the southeast chamber was changed during the course of construction, very likely from sheathing similar to the vertical beaded boards backing the chimneypiece in the southwest chamber, but mounted horizontally. Removal of such a wall finish and replacement with fielded paneling provided a second-floor room with much of the formality of the first floor hall below it. Such shifts during construction are not unusual in the least, for a number of other early buildings have revealed similar evidence. Such things could be taken as evidence that a building had been upgraded, but we have already seen that the mantel carving of this room was executed by the same artisan that carved portions of the exterior frame. Had the



Figure 42. Radiograph 15 of the baseboard of the east or passage wall of the second floor southwest chamber; the source was located in the passage, and the film in the chamber. The exposure was taken 41 inches south of the passage door frame. This exposure is part of a series taken of the chamber base. Visible are extensive plaster debris (a) in the wall pocket, roughly 10 1/2" deep, probably associated with electrical work; lath and baseboards are nailed to both sides of the stud at inch 41 (b). A wire nail in the stud is visible 10 5/8" above the floor, along with metal lath along the left edge of the stud (c), both indicating modern repairs. There are no empty nail holes in the studs of this wall, indicating original plaster on both sides.

chimneypiece been installed in the room before it was paneled, it would have had to be removed before the paneling was installed, which hardly seems plausible. The plaster debris from the hall partition further strengthens this. Also, the garret is finished with paneled doors and other details that are consistent with the second-floor woodwork. If the lower stories of the house had been upgraded at a later time, the experience of the authors indicates that overt evidence of earlier attic detailing such as batten doors, plain casings, and sheathing rather than plaster would have survived a later retrimming of the lower floors. This, however, is not the case, for the finish throughout the attic is of high quality for a Carolina attic, and no evidence was found that it has been added. It should be noted that the fields of all the paneling in the house, including the doors, are sunk slightly below the surrounding stiles and rails. In the northeast, this is often understood to be a later detail, since most raised paneling in pre-Revolutionary buildings of the middle and northern states has fields that rise above the frames. There are, no doubt, exceptions to this rule in the north. Exceptions certainly occur in the south; in the MESDA collection is a northeastern North Carolina desk-and-bookcase of 1720-35 with dramatic arched-head panels with fields sunk well below the frames.¹⁷



Figure 43. Staircase, north end of the first-floor passage, after the 1960s restoration. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 44. Second-floor staircase landing, showing the stringer and brackets of the third run.

The stairs of the Cupola House were part of the woodwork that was not removed after the 1918 sale of the interiors, but examination of the balustrade and carved brackets appears to indicate that removal of the stairs very likely had begun. Numerous wire nails suggest re-attachment of the elements, not just later repairs. Alterations to the stair had already taken place before 1918, however, for at the time that the Brooklyn Museum was in the process of removing the woodwork, the curtail or volute of the bottom tread was largely missing. As a result of this, the replica stair installed at Brooklyn has a straight run to the floor. On the original stair, the bottom step itself is a baulk of solid timber, and enough of its curtail remained to guide its reconstruc-

tion during the 1960s restoration of the house (fig. 43). The handrail was reconstructed with a ramp based upon surviving mortises, in addition to using the existing ramps and newels as precedent. Interestingly, portions of the handrail are of mahogany, while other pieces are made of yellow pine. A limited amount of mahogany was available in the Albemarle certainly as early as the 1720s, for it begins to occur in southeastern Virginia furniture by that time.



Figure 45. Detail of the brackets of the third run of the stair.

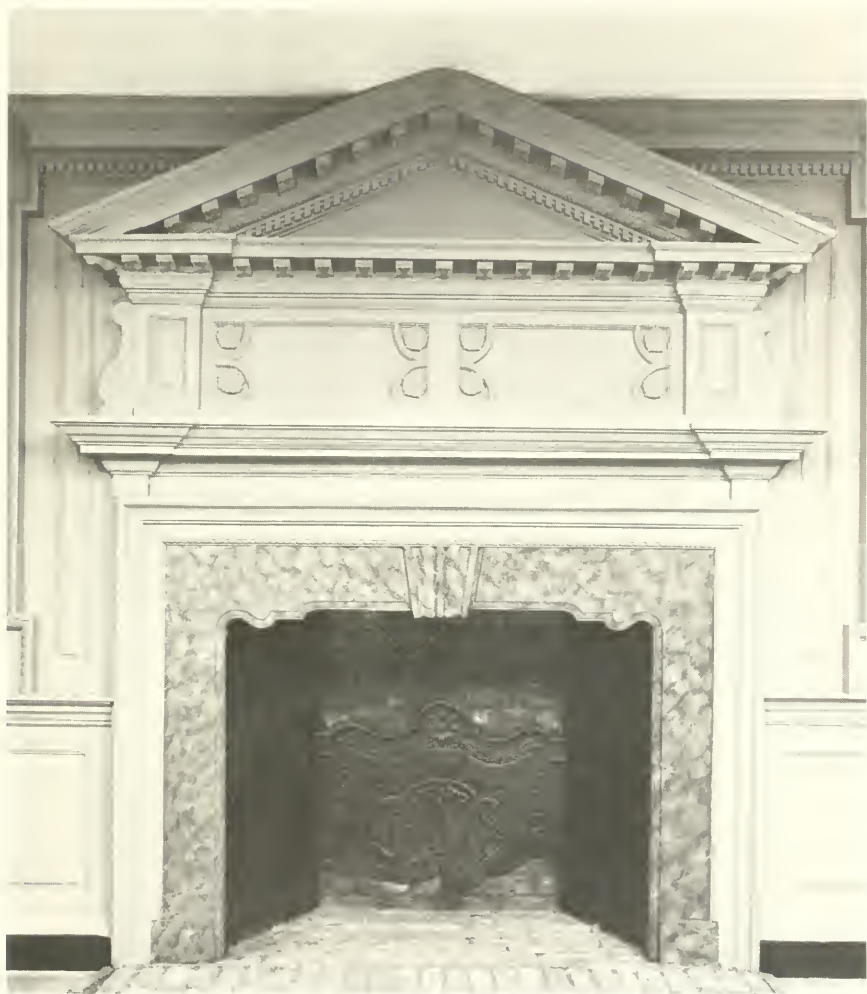


Figure 46. First-floor southeast hall chimneypiece as installed in the Brooklyn Museum. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

The S-shaped stair brackets (fig. 45) of the Cupola House basically are a flat version of a console turned on its side. The pattern is a familiar one, illustrated with numerous variations in eighteenth century English architectural books. A slightly smaller version of the same device is employed as flat consoles at each side of the parlor overmantel (fig. 46), but without the flower inside the upper volute. Both the stair brackets and the overmantel consoles have stemmed flowers trailing from the lower volute,



Figure 47. Detail of the first-floor hall chimneypiece and south window architrave as installed in the Brooklyn Museum. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

a standard late Baroque motif. These are quite flat, with no modeling other than rounded edges, and all of the flowers are simply veined in the same manner. The flowers used in these appliques are the most successful elements of the carving. Even more robust are the eight flowers set into the arched spandrels of the hall overmantel. Here the carver alternated the outer petals with small points, five on each flower, providing much the appearance of a Tudor rose.

The fully-carved entablature of the hall, coupled with the carved elements of the chimneypiece, result in an impressive architectural display. The boldest elements are the flowers ornamenting the overmantel panels and the modillions of the pitch pediment, each a miniature version of the carved plate and purlin ends on the exterior of the building. The scale of the woodwork in this room seems to overcome the available space, and indeed the pediment actually intrudes into the plaster of the ceiling. The crown of the pediment, however, was not cut at ceiling height; instead, the plaster buries it slightly. This is also true of the pitch pediment of the overmantel of the southeast chamber directly over the hall. The somewhat awkward installation of these pediments has suggested proof to some that the interiors were added and simply crammed into the available space as necessary. In a sense, the slightly overscaled woodwork of this room repeats the architectural anomalies of the stair installation. Like the stair, the chimneypiece of the hall shows something of a lack of prior planning. The classical tenets of dynamic proportion demanded a certain height that the pediment needed to attain in relation to its width, so the huge size of the fireplace caused the joiner to draw a chimneypiece that did not quite fit the room. The somewhat "squashed" effect that resulted is rather charming in a vernacular sense, but offers no proof of anything other than to corroborate other stylistic aberrations already discussed. The nature of this chimneypiece caused Waterman to compare it with the mid-eighteenth century Old Brick House (fig. 48) near Elizabeth City in Pasquotank County, a bit less than thirty miles northeast of Edenton. Actually a brick-ended frame house, the Old Brick house had a fine parlor now enlarged and installed in a private residence in Delaware. The "curious and individual overmantel," as Waterman surmised, "relates Old Brick House to the Cupola House."¹⁸ Actually, the overmantel, shown here in its original state (fig. 49), is a direct adaptation of a door head from Plate CCCXXV, Vol. 2, of Batty Langley's *Ancient Masonry*



Figure 48. The Old Brick House, 1750-65, near Elizabeth City in Pasquotank County, N.C. HABS photograph by Thomas T. Waterman, 1940; reproduced from the collection of the Library of Congress.



Figure 49. Parlor chimneypiece in situ, the Old Brick House. Photograph from a private collection.

of 1736, a very rare instance where an early North Carolina house borrowed from a published design source. Interestingly, Langley credits a much earlier architect for the design with the inscription "By Michael Angelo." The same design was included in Plate 74 of Langley's 1741 *Builder's Jewel*.¹⁹ Although quite a wonderful conceit, there is nothing to indicate any tie between this chimneypiece and the interiors of the Cupola House.

It has been suggested that the chimneypiece of the hall was taken from Plate H (fig. 51) of the 1748 third edition of William Salmon's often-cited *Palladio Londinensis*, and indeed there are similarities. There is no doubt that Salmon's work was both widely circulated and assiduously studied by eighteenth century builders. It is also true that Salmon in turn had carefully studied the work of his predecessors, including Andrea Palladio and Inigo Jones. Like many British architectural books, or any design books for that matter, the various editions of Salmon basically present combinations of standard classical designs. The 1734 first edition of *Palladio Londinensis* illustrates no elevations of chimneypieces; these plates were added to later editions. Caution should be observed in attributing a design to any plate, unless it is patently an exact copy of a specific plate as in the use of the Langley door-head design for the Old Brick house overmantel. This may be proven readily by making a comparative examination of the available architectural books of the period. That Salmon was simply following the mainstream of fashion, for example, is evident in the engraved elevations for a room designed by Colen Campbell and illustrated in Plate 100 of the 1725 Volume III of *Vitruvius Britannicus* (fig. 52). Like the plate in Salmon, Campbell's chimneypiece is composed of a broken pitch pediment with flat consoles below. Full consoles below the mantel shelf trail husks down the pilasters, much in the manner of the Salmon plate. Campbell describes this plate as a section of a great hall "of my Invention." In Plate 34 of the same book he illustrates a section of the great hall of Houghton in Norfolk, the seat of Robert Walpole. Campbell must have designed much of the structure of Houghton, which still stands, but William Kent was responsible for drawing the mantel that Campbell illustrates, and it is virtually identical to the chimneypiece in Plate 100 that Campbell claimed as his own design.

From this, it should be readily apparent that architects freely copied from each other, and that standard classical designs were the part of most builders' repertoire. There is no evidence that



Figure 50. Cupola House first-floor southeast hall chimneypiece, taken in situ in 1918. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

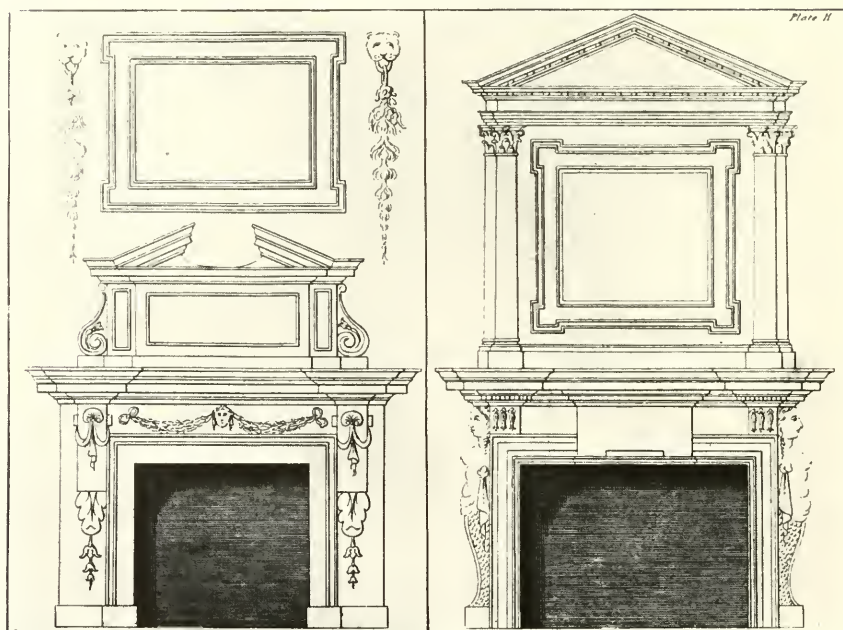


Figure 51. Plate H of William Salmon's *Palladio Londonensis*, third edition, 1748.

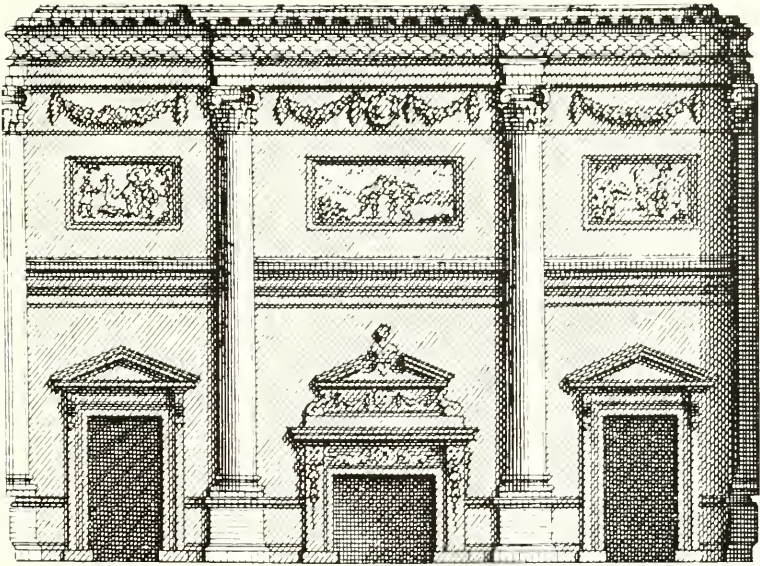


Figure 52. A detail from Plate 100 from *Colen Campbell, Vitruvius Britannicus*, vol. 3, London, 1725.

the joiner/and/or/carver at the Cupola House used any architectural book, or indeed that he even owned one. There is every evidence that he was well versed in the basic elements of Baroque classicism, however, even if the carving is not urban quality, and some of the interior detail is vernacular in nature.

Noted earlier is the fact that the marble facing of the hall fireplace is a later addition. The original fireplace opening was slightly wider, and the segmental arch was exposed at the top. It is possible that this facing was installed either by Corbin or Dickinson, and the firebox reduced in size at that time. Such an alteration is earlier, then, than the changes made to the second floor fireplaces. The one-piece facing illustrated here is a replica of the original produced for the Brooklyn Museum; the original (fig. 50) was made in three pieces, as all such facings were, but had broken in several places. The facing of the replica chimney-piece now in the Cupola House itself is of marbleized wood, which seems a logical alternative to the problem of finding stone that matched the color and figure of the original material.

The architrave of the hall mantel now in the Brooklyn Museum may well represent woodwork that was added to accommodate the marble facing. The inside edges of the architrave have a carved



Figure 53. North wall of the southeast hall, taken in situ in 1918. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 54. North wall of the southeast hall as it is now installed in the Brooklyn Museum. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

ovolo that does not relate to other carved moldings in the house, but the authors have not been able to examine this carving other than in photographs. The strong possibility that the architrave was added, however, becomes evident in a comparison with the parlor across the passage. Except for the obvious difference of the robust Baroque broken-scrolled pediment in the southwest room (fig. 56), the formula for the parlor chimneypiece, at least below the pediment, is largely the same as that in the hall. The molding sequences for the mantel shelf are very close, and both have projecting sections at each end of the shelf, the projections resting upon small plinths below. In the parlor, rather flat consoles trailing a strange triangular applique carved with acanthus and husks lends visual support to the plinths and shelf above. The acanthus carving of the consoles is closely aligned with the modillion-like joist ends of the cupola (fig. 33), but without the heavy central spine of the latter. In the hall, similar but slightly wider plinths rest upon the deep cyma molding comprising the backband of the architrave; on the left side, the plinth does not align with the side of the backband (fig. 46). This could be the result of error in the installation of the room in Brooklyn, but the presence of consoles in the parlor, which is a lesser room, strongly suggests that the hall also had consoles below the plinths, and an entirely different architrave.

Like that in the hall, the fireplace of the parlor has been reduced in size. It is probable that all of its backband molding as well as the paneled fascia above the fireplace is an eighteenth century remodeling. A paneled fascia occurring inside an architrave is a strange element even in a house that is quite characterized by vernacular details, and the width of its panel bevels and style of frame molding do not match the balance of the woodwork. Like the hall, the parlor chimneypiece originally displayed a massive segmental arch, and it is doubtful that any material originally covered the exposed arch and jambs at the sides, perhaps other than plaster. This is true of all the fireplaces except for those associated with the northwest chimney.

Taken both from the historical viewpoint and as its own document of style and technology, the Cupola House offers certain concrete evidence while tantalizing us with questions the answers to which remain elusive.

The history of the property must be considered alongside the architectural evidence, and a review of the Cupola House



Figure 55. Detail of the southwest parlor chimneypiece as it is now installed in the Brooklyn Museum. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 56. West wall of the southwest parlor, taken in situ in 1918. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

chronology derived from Bruce Cheeseman's study is appropriate. Lot Number One of the new plan of Edenton, where the house stands today, was purchased by Christopher Gale on 25 April 1724 for the consideration of five shillings. On 6 May of the same year, Gale sold the property to Richard Sanderson of Currituck and Perquimans counties for £25, one-hundred times the amount that Gale had paid for the same property. Sanderson, a merchant mariner who constantly plied the coastwise trade to New England, married Gale's sister-in-law, Ruth Laker Minge, in 1726; she died two years later. On 26 April 1726, barely two years after he had purchased the property, Sanderson sold "Lot no. one & house" to John Dunston for £100 sterling. Dunston, a naval officer charged with the collection of port duties, died during the summer ensuing. His widow, Martha Dunston, resold the "lott and house" to Richard Sanderson on 1 August 1727, the sale price remaining at £100 sterling. Mrs. Dunston remained in the dwelling, apparently as a renter, until the summer of 1730.

On 12 November 1731 Sanderson again sold the property, which was described as "houses outhouses & Edifices," to the London merchant William Morton. The sale price had dropped

to "85 pounds Province Bills." Very little is known of Morton, who apparently spent a great deal of time in England. Nevertheless, the property remained in his family until 1756. Less than a year after he had purchased the house, on 23 August 1732, Morton appointed John Montgomery "to sell and dispose" of the property. This was not done. Morton retained the house, and died in the late 1740s; in 1749 his heirs appointed Thomas Barker, among others, to settle the estate and dispose of the property. Barker was an attorney who came to Edenton from Massachusetts during the 1720s.

Francis Corbin arrived in Edenton in 1750 and leased a plantation near the mouth of Pembroke Creek on the west side of town. He became Granville's sole agent in North Carolina in 1751. On 19 April 1756 Corbin purchased the property, "containing one-half acre & all Houses Buildings and Gardens" for £61:5:0 "Proclamation Money" from Thomas Barker, the agent of the Morton heirs. Corbin completed construction of a wharf on the south side of the property in 1758. He married Jean Innes in the fall of 1761, and thereafter apparently spent most of his time at "Point Pleasant" near Wilmington. He died in the fall of 1767, and the contents of the Cupola House were sold the following year. The 1769 Sauthier plan of Edenton (fig. 3 of the Cheeseman article) shows the house situated in the center of the lot. Four major dependencies are indicated at the rear of the house on the north side, and two small structures, possibly gazebo-like garden buildings on the south or street front. Upon Corbin's death, the property reverted to his family; on 7 February 1777 Edmund Corbin of Wilmington sold the "water lott Houses tenements Buildings and Appurtenances" to Dr. Samuel Dickinson for £400. Dickinson and his heirs owned the property until 1918.

The chain of ownership of Lot Number One, then, indicates that a house of some description occupied the property from at least 1726 until the present. During the course of five transferrals of the property, the sale price ranged from £100 sterling to as low as £61:5:0 province money when Corbin bought it, ascending to £400 in North Carolina currency in 1777. The Dickinson purchase price no doubt indicates both the rampant inflation of the early Revolutionary period as well as improvements that Corbin had made, including the wharf. Other than the wharf, the exact nature of Corbin's work on the property, including the house and dependencies, is unknown. Alterations or remodeling and repair to the house that Corbin could have carried out are the

present exterior crown moldings, the first-floor hall and parlor fireplace facings and surrounds, and possibly the present porch. It is equally possible, however, that Samuel Dickinson effected these changes. The carpenter, Robert Kirshaw, was awarded £211:6:0 against the Corbin estate in May, 1772. As we have seen, one alteration that cannot be attributed to Corbin is the finial at the front gable of the house. The present finial appears to have been installed at an undetermined date in the nineteenth century, probably after 1850.

An examination of contemporary sale prices of properties, with a particular focus upon existing structures that can be compared with the Cupola House, has not yielded any significant conclusion. It appears evident that the initial £100, while a seemingly low figure, could have been a sum sufficient to purchase a dwelling of the Cupola House size and quality, but that is by no means definitive proof of anything other than the fact that a house sat upon the lot in 1726. The most useful documentation presently available, then, is the dwelling itself.

There is no totally concrete evidence that the Cupola House was built by Richard Sanderson, or any other specific individual, for that matter. As we have seen, the entire structure is a contiguous unit, constructed all at once except for the later addition of a chimney. The evidence of this contiguity, however, does not provide us with a firm date. The building could have been constructed at any time between 1724 and 1756, but so broad a chronological spread is unacceptable. An attempt to narrow the logical date range must take into account the factors discussed before.

Yet another consideration is the possibility that a structure erected by Sanderson was either destroyed by a catastrophe such as a hurricane or even razed by a later owner of the property. If either was the case, then all visible evidence of an earlier structure was removed before the present building was erected. There is no documentation of any destruction of a building on Lot Number One. It is also possible that one of the dependencies shown on the north side of the lot by Sauthier actually was a dwelling that preceded the Cupola House. One of them, in fact, is shown to be fully as large in plan as the house itself; situated on the west property line, the building faced Broad Street, with its long axis oriented north-south. This building, however, is thought to have been the kitchen, and it may have combined other functions such as a quarters and coach house. No archaeology

has determined anything about the nature of this and other dependencies. The large unit must have been gone by 1918, for it does not show in the photograph of that year (fig. 22). In this picture, a painted brick building stands behind the Cupola House. Unlike the building in the Sauthier plan, its gable end faces Broad Street. It is not known what this building was, but it could well represent an alteration of an earlier form. The arched window visible on its second floor, for example, is wider than that on the first floor. In 1759 Corbin purchased a brass lock and 10,000 bricks from the estate of Clement Hall, material that could have been used in the construction of a dependency.²⁰ Despite the former presence of this and other buildings of indeterminate age on the lot, however, the Cupola House makes a strong statement for itself as the primary structure on Lot Number One.

The house is an architectural anomaly, whether compared with northern or southern dwellings. There are relatively few double-pile frame houses in the tidewater South before the post-Revolutionary period. No other jettied buildings are known to survive in the coastal areas of the South. The Cupola House does not offer a good comparison with seventeenth century New England buildings that have deep framed second-floor overhangs. Sharply diverging from New England convention is the central hall, end chimney plan of the Cupola House, as well as the cupola itself, the oculus in the front gable, the use of guillotine sash, and the radically different construction of the jetty. The interiors of the Cupola House, while essentially Baroque in nature, nevertheless have details that are more modish than many urban New England interiors that likely are one or more decades later. For example, the use of bolection moldings where fielded panels join their frames persisted in some New England towns to the mid-eighteenth century. For these reasons, the house should not be presented as a translation of northern architecture. Far preferable would be an architectural comparison between the Cupola House and other Albemarle or even lower Chesapeake houses, but no significant parallels have been found. Dwellings like the Old Brick house in Pasquotank often may suggest vernacular similarities, but these have melted away under scrutiny over the years. It may be that the Vernacular Architecture Group or independent architectural historians in Britain will be able to reveal parallels to the Cupola House at some time in the future.

The Cupola House blends details of style and construction that are largely old-fashioned, but tempered nonetheless by a

degree of sophistication sufficient to rank the building high among American dwellings of its time. Aspects of the house that indeed are quite vernacular, and even naive or seemingly post-medieval, provide a dramatic foil for the classical elements that draw the house away from a representation of nothing more than a purely local statement. The exceptional amount of eave depth at the gables, coupled with the projecting and decorated plates and purlins, is one of the anachronistic aspects of the house that caused one of the research team to characterize the house as "basically Georgian with a number of embarrassing seventeenth century hiccups." The eaves actually represent a spasm that is earlier than 1600. The massive framing of the house also seems to be an early detail, but the Cupola House is not alone in seeming to have been "over-built." German housewrights in the back country of Carolina were well known for such practices even into the nineteenth century. Seldom encountered, however, is the degree of naivete in the framing of the Cupola House roof, most particularly in regard to the different pitch of the principal and common rafters due to the unusual application of the purlins. One possible reason for this discrepancy may have been the carpenter's distrust of loading the jetty structure. Other aspects of the house framing are equally unconventional, or even more so, as we have seen in the method used to obtain an overshot second floor. The riveted false girt and accompanying brackets suggest the mind of a shipwright at work, endeavoring to solve an unfamiliar puzzle.

The asymmetry of the facades, the roof finials, front gable, jettied second floor, and extended eaves are all post-medieval features upon which is transposed essentially Baroque architectural language that includes the classical cupola and other exterior finish such as moldings and the profile of the brackets under the jetty. The house makes its closest pass to conventional architecture of the eighteenth century with its excellent interiors and the employment of guillotine sash in the windows. Nevertheless, the interiors all represent the high Baroque classicism typical of middling-quality urban British interiors of the last quarter of the seventeenth century. This is evident in the Cupola House's display of sophisticated entablatures, full-height ranges of paneling, stopfluted pilasters, crossetted architraves, scrolled or modillioned pitch pediments, and an elaborate stair. Even so, the spatial application of some of these details at times reveals inadequate solutions in interior architecture, as we have seen in the stair and pediment of the hall overmantel. Such problems do not offer

documentation of interior remodeling or addition, however, particularly since the exterior carving that is an integral part of the frame proves that the finish work inside the house is contemporary with the rest of the structure. The interior trim itself is not derivative in the sense that the joiner can be shown to have referred to published design sources of the period. The classical detail employed, then, indicates a joiner — or perhaps even his patron — possessed with a working knowledge of urban interior architecture, and in the case of the artisan, the molding planes needed to execute them.

Stylistically, some of the carved decoration of the interior is earlier than the paneling, architraves, and chimneypieces. Portions approach Mannerism in their flat, repetitive execution, suggesting the possibility that the joiner who drew the interiors did not carve them himself. Indeed, joinery and carving were usually separate trades. The carver was workmanlike in his approach, but his ornament reveals a limited number and variety of carving tools, and his style identifies the artisan as a carver not trained in the detail necessary for fine architectural finish. Nothing is known of the sort of carving available to Edentonians before the mid-1740s, but work done by cabinetmakers there by 1750 and into the 1760s shows a great deal more sophistication (see Cheeseman, figs. 5-8). That is not to say that the Cupola House carver could not have been a tradesman who was brought in to do a job, and then sailed away, leaving no other examples of his work in the region. It seems improbable, however, that an individual who ordered carving after 1750 would not have taken advantage of more skilled carvers already resident in the town. Even more improbable is that the Cupola House was built after 1750, but if the carving and other interiors indeed were executed during that decade, then the entire house was built then. Logic, however, provides a better conclusion: the Cupola House and its interiors, with the exception of alterations to the first floor fireplace surrounds and the even later Neoclassical trimming of two rooms, has nothing to do with Francis Corbin other than the fact that the man occupied the space. Architectural matters aside, it should be considered unusual for a well-educated and wealthy former Londoner like Corbin to bespeak interior appointments that would have been deemed three-quarters of a century out of date in his native England. Indeed, it seems that Corbin was quite conscious of his rank and image in the colony, which is nothing unusual for an official with such an important office.

If Corbin did not build the Cupola House, then we are left with the puzzle of who indeed was the first inhabitant. A dendrochronological examination of the house's timbers could be revealing if an accurate baseline sampling of tree-ring curves for the eastern Albemarle is established. Dendrochronology, if properly applied, can provide a very close date for when a tree was cut, and therefore presumably when a sawn timber was put into use. The process involves the procurement of drilled core samples in order to study the climatological impact upon growing seasons as revealed in the tree rings. For accuracy, a number of baseline samples are required. In the Southeast, and particularly in the tidewater, the annual pattern of rainfall may vary widely even within one county, and this can be a serious detriment to the accuracy of dating timbers by this process. Trees with a root system situated in groundwater can also show radically different seasonal growth patterns than those on dry ground.²¹

Of the survey team that examined the Cupola House, two — Parsons and Bishir — have observed from the viewpoint of their own personal experience that a likely date for the construction of the dwelling lies in the late 1730s or during the 1740s. Parsons suggests that the first owner's "surface orientation" affected everything visible, including the double plan, cupola, and elaborate woodwork, but that his lack of knowledge in exterior architecture left the building reliant upon vernacular building methods for the frame and chimneys. The greatest problem faced in this study, of course, is just what vernacular the cupola house belongs to. It seems improbable that it is truly unique, if a view wider than Carolina is taken, but overviews are dangerous. The interiors suggest nothing that would make them later than well-known first-quarter eighteenth century Virginia houses such as Marmion or Tuckahoe. Like other Virginia houses, however, the regional attributes of Tuckahoe's interiors are more dramatically tempered by urban antecedents than the work of the Cupola House, especially in regard to the carving. Nevertheless, no architectural historian actually has been able to present evidence that the Cupola House and its interiors could not have been finished as early as the 1720s.²²

With Corbin logically eliminated as the builder of the house, we are left with Richard Sanderson, who built some sort of dwelling on the property, sold it to John Dunston, and repurchased it fourteen months later, holding title to the property for six years in all. There is a remote possibility that Dunston had a hand in

the erection of the house described in the sale if Cheeseman's hypothesis that the Dunstons were renting the lot prior to the sale is correct. Such arrangements were not uncommon. William Morton owned the property for more than fifteen years, but occupied it sporadically; his heirs held title thereafter until 1756. Three attorneys were appointed by the Morton heirs to dispose of the estate; one of them, Thomas Barker, was a resident of Edenton. It hardly seems likely that Barker had anything to do with the construction of the building, although it is possible that he lived there for a time. We know very little about Morton, who certainly could have built the house. However, there is no actual documentary research that can be correlated significantly with the fabric of the house. From that standpoint, it is equally, if not more likely, that Sanderson built the Cupola House as we see it, with, of course, the exception of the Neoclassical alterations. In the present absence of possible further research on either Sanderson or Morton, then it seems plausible to support the logical conclusion that the Cupola House was built by one of those two individuals at some date between 1724 and about 1740. John Dunston cannot be ruled out completely, for he had the means and the time to complete such a dwelling; however, he is a much less likely candidate than either Sanderson or Morton.

Whether or not the year of construction is ever reliably proven, the Cupola House is a remarkable statement. That it reflects a strange mixture of naive or even post-medieval concepts with more sophisticated details, and whether the resulting potpourri of technology and architecture is due to ignorance on the part of an owner or builder, is almost beside the point. Within the acknowledged limitations of our current understanding, the house is architecturally unique in the South, and indeed even along the entire east coast. Its pastiche of fascinating anachronisms, coupled with the colorful history of its inhabitants, make the Cupola House a very special place indeed.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Tileston Waterman, *The Early Architecture of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 29.
2. Thomas Tileston Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia, 1706-1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1945), pp. 232, 308.
3. The date of Tuckahoe has long been considered to be earlier than this. Waterman suggests, for example, that the building "was commenced shortly after 1712" and that the brick-ended west wing was added "after 1730" (Waterman, *Mansions*, p. 84). Current thinking among architectural historians, however, suggests a slightly later date for the early portion, which, like the addition, is one room deep.
4. See James R. Melchor, N. Gordon Lohr, and Marilyn S. Melchor, *Eastern Shore, Virginia Raised-Panel Furniture, 1730-1830* (Norfolk, the Chrysler Museum, 1982), figs. 3, 40.
5. Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island, 1640-1915* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 58-9, pl. 74; Basil Oliver, *Old Houses and Village Buildings in East Anglia, Norfolk, Suffolk, & Essex* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1912), pl. LI. According to Geoffrey Beard, in England, buildings with cupolas were usually associated with customs and customs houses. Information courtesy Audrey H. Michie from a conversation with Beard.
6. Robert Bell Rettig, *Guide to Cambridge Architecture: Ten Walking Tours* (Cambridge: Cambridge Historical Commission, 1969), no. F22.
7. Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625-1725* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 31, 61 (Fairbanks house); p. 9 (house in Norfolk).
8. Robert J. Cain, et al., *North Carolina Higher-Court Minutes, 1724-1730* (Raleigh: The Division of Archives and History, 1981), pp. 174-5.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-14.
10. Cummings, *Framed Houses*, pp. 37, 136.
11. J. Frederick Kelly, *The Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), p. 63, plates IX, X.
12. The 1769 Miles Brewton house in Charleston, S. C., for example, has massive angle irons at the corners of the upper and lower floor framing of the double portico.

13. David McLaren Hart, "X-Ray Inspection of Historic Structures: and Aid to dating & Structural Analysis," *Technology & Conservation Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Summer 1977, p. 10; see also David M. Hart, "X-Ray Investigation of Buildings," *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology*, Vol. V, No. 1, 1973, p. 9; David M. Hart, "X-Ray Analysis of the Narbonne House," *Bulletin of the APT*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1974, p. 78; Mary Joan Kevlin, "Radiographic Inspection of Plank-House Construction," *Bulletin of the APT*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, 1986. Ms. Kevlin details the use of a portable unit of the sort used by veterinarians, and her study suggests that the use of such a device may be less expensive than a gamma ray emitter.
14. For excellent view of the current installation of the rooms in the Brooklyn Museum, see Donald C. Pierce and Hope Alswang, *American Interiors: New England & the South* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1983), particularly pp. 44, 48.
15. Waterman, *North Carolina*, p. 29.
16. Telephone conversation between Bivins and Peter Sandbeck of the Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, May, 1989; Sandbeck supervised the re-roofing and other repairs of the building during February and March, 1989.
17. John Bivins, Jr., *The Furniture of Coastal North Carolina, 1700-1820* (Winston-Salem: The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 1988), p. 139, fig. 5.55.
18. Waterman, *North Carolina*, p. 29.
19. This plate is illustrated on p. 34 of Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: North Carolina* (Savannah: The Beehive Press, 1985).
20. Estate Sale of Clement Hall, Box 45, Chowan County Estate Records, 1759, North Carolina Archives. Information courtesy of James C. Jordan III.
21. Rainer Berger, Veronika Giertz, and Walter Horn, Can German Tree-Ring Curves be Applied in France and England?, *Vernacular Architecture*, Vols. 1 and 2 (York, England: The Vernacular Architecture Group, 1970), p. 4.
22. Abbott Lowell Cummings has made the observation that there is "no reason why the [Cupola] house couldn't be from the 1720s," based upon his examination of published views of the dwelling. Mr. Cummings also confirmed the futility of comparing early northeastern architecture with that of the South, where, as he further observes, prevailing British trends often were embraced earlier than in the North. Telephone conversation with Bivins, 24 May 1989.

MESDA seeks manuscripts which treat virtually any facet of southern decorative art for publication in the JOURNAL. The MESDA staff would also like to examine any privately-held primary research material (documents and manuscripts) from the South, and southern newspapers published in 1820 and earlier.

Some back issues of the *Journal*
are available.

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